

HITLER'S STRATEGY

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PREFACE

THE subject of this book is Hitler's strategy. I have tried to preserve the distinction between the sphere of strategy and the sphere of operations, and have wished to deal only with the former. Thus Hitler's share in the conduct of operations, in the *execution* of his plans, figures hardly at all in the book; and the main emphasis throughout is on the *formulation* of his central or inter-theatre plans for the strategy of the war as a whole.

I have set myself a second limitation by confining my use of evidence to contemporary documents as far as possible. I think it will be agreed that there is some merit in this approach if the documents can stand on their own, without the support of evidence which, however reliable, is less authentic; and I hope to have shown that they can.

It is as a result of this approach that I have been able to give more detailed attention to naval subjects and opinions than to others, for the most important and complete series of documents available on the subject happens to be among the captured German naval records. But, as will be obvious enough, I have not limited myself to the evidence of the naval records. On the contrary, whenever it was relevant to the subject of Hitler's strategy, or to other points raised by a study of the naval archives, I have incorporated the evidence of any non-naval documents on which I could lay my hands. All the documents presented at the Nuremberg Trial have been sifted with this end in view, and these have provided most of my accessory material; but other collections of documents have occasionally been pressed into service. The chief sources used are described in more detail in the following Note on Sources and References.

For all these attempts to offset it, the naval bias remains; it may be argued that it leads to a somewhat arbitrary and incomplete

PREFACE

treatment of the subject; but, apart from the fact that the naval evidence is so complete that it ought to enable a balanced view to be taken, there is, I submit, another reason why this approach can be followed without too much risk of distortion. The naval evidence is not only more voluminous; it is more relevant than any other. For the British position was central among Hitler's problems, and sea-power, so instrumental in the end in his defeat, was fundamental in its effect on his strategy from the outset. I am aware that this is the sort of thing the British are brought up to believe. But I was not seeking to prove it when I began this work, and it was only after studying the evidence that I realised to the full the validity of time-honoured assumptions in this case.

All of which is not an attempt to disarm criticism, or to hide the fact that shortcomings and omissions exist in plenty in the following pages. I know they exist and that they will be found. But I also know that they would have been more frequent and more glaring if my wife had been less helpful, if Captain B. H. Liddell Hart had not made valuable suggestions and if Mr T. A. M. Bishop and Mr R. N. B. Brett-Smith had not troubled to read my text. To the last mentioned my thanks are also due for bringing to my attention the photograph of Hitler which appears as the frontispiece. I must also note that it is with the permission of the Controller, H.M. Stationery Office, that I have quoted from my chief source, *The Führer Conferences on Naval Affairs*; and that some of the following chapters have already provided the material for a course of lectures in the University.

F.H.H.

NOTE ON SOURCES AND REFERENCES

THE German Naval Archives, captured in their entirety when Germany was overrun, contained, among much other material, a file of papers of particular importance for this subject: the minutes of those of Hitler's wartime conferences with his Commanders-in-Chief which were attended by the C.-in-C. Navy. Two editions of these papers have been published. Translated by the Admiralty and the United States Navy Department, they were first released by the Admiralty, for limited distribution, in a series of books entitled *The Führer Conferences on Naval Affairs*; and these books were later reprinted *in toto* in *Brassey's Naval Annual* for 1948. This file forms the central material for the following study. Except when otherwise indicated in a note, all the evidence in the book is taken from this source. As the simplest reference system in this case is to give the date of the conference concerned, and as I have given this on each occasion in the text, I have not thought it necessary to provide note references to this material.

Important as they are, these minutes formed only a small part of the captured naval archives. The most important of the documents from the rest of the archives, and many from non-naval sources, were introduced in evidence at the Nuremburg Trial. My access to this material has been through the volumes of documents issued in connection with the Trial. Once again, two separate editions of these documents may be consulted. The official edition, *The Trial of Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal*, was published at Nuremburg. It contains, in their original language, all the documents introduced during the Trial. Another publication, issued by the United States Government Printing office and entitled *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, contains the most important of them in English translation. Both collections retain the document numbers used at the Trial. My references to *Nuremburg Documents* (abbreviated as *N.D.*), in the notes I have provided whenever I have used this source, are also to those numbers, and it has not been necessary to specify the edition.

The second of these publications, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*,

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contains, however, some material, chiefly affidavits and pre-Trial interrogations or statements of the accused, which is not included in the official edition of the documents, but which I have occasionally used. When referring to this material I have added *Conspiracy and Aggression* (abbreviated as *C. and A.*), after the words *Nuremburg Documents*; and when the reference is not to the main volumes of *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, but to the supplementary volumes A and B which appeared after the main collection, I have also added this fact.

The evidence of the witnesses and the accused at the Nuremburg Trial, as opposed to the documents introduced, has also proved relevant on a few occasions. This evidence is to be found in the Proceedings of the Trial, a transcript of which is published in *The Trial of Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal*, the official volumes already mentioned. There is, however, another edition of the Nuremburg Trial Proceedings which is more readily accessible in this country and which I have therefore followed when giving references to volumes (parts) and pages in the notes. This is the series of volumes published by His Majesty's Stationery Office under the title *The Trial of German Major War Criminals, Proceedings of the International Military Tribunal Sitting at Nuremburg*.

Many of the documents introduced as evidence at the Trial were read into the Proceedings, and in some cases I thought it might be useful if I provided the page reference to the *Proceedings* as well as the document number. When my notes mention both the *Documents* and the *Proceedings*, the references, unless otherwise stated, are to the same, and not to different, material.

The above are the chief sources used in this book. At some points I have used other document collections and secondary works, but the note references to these require no explanation.

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CHAPTER I

THE GERMAN NAVY, THE RUSSIAN PACT, THE BRITISH PROBLEM AND THE DECISION TO MAKE WAR

I

WHEN Hitler invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, Germany was not ready for a major war at sea. The German surface fleet consisted of no more than 2 old battleships, 2 battle-cruisers, 3 pocket battleships, 8 cruisers and 22 destroyers. A few heavy ships were still building; but only two battleships and one cruiser were completed during the war.¹ More surprising still, no preparations had been made for a prolonged U-boat campaign. The U-boats had been the most serious menace to Great Britain in the First World War; subsequent technical developments had further increased the efficiency of under-water weapons; yet only 57 German U-boats had been built by 1939, and only 26 of these were suitable for Atlantic operations.

This was not the Navy which the German Naval Staff had hoped to command in a war against Great Britain. There was neither the battle-fleet with which Admiral Raeder, the Commander-in-Chief, had thought, one day, to challenge British sea-power, nor the U-boat force which Admiral Doenitz, Flag Officer U-boats, regarded as indispensable for a German victory.

In the autumn of 1938, in preparation for a future war against Great Britain, Raeder had made plans by which Germany would have, if not a large, at least a well-balanced fleet within a reasonable period; Doenitz had taken care to see that these plans provided for an increase in the number of German

¹ See Appendix A.

U-boats. As these plans stood at the beginning of 1939, the German navy, including the fleet in being and the ships already building,¹ was to consist of 8 battleships, the 2 battle-cruisers, the 3 pocket battleships, 16 cruisers, 2 aircraft-carriers and about 190 U-boats by the end of 1944. Further additions were to produce a total fleet of 8 battleships, 2 battle-cruisers, 3 pocket battleships, 33 cruisers, 4 aircraft-carriers and about 270 U-boats by 1948.² But Raeder was forced to modify these plans in the Spring of 1939, when increasing international tension suggested that war might break out earlier than had been expected. He was forced to abandon them altogether when war did break out, in spite of his hopes, in the autumn of that year.

His reaction was to regret that Hitler had not waited longer for his war with Great Britain. In a memorandum—written for the naval files and not for Hitler's reading—of 3 September 1939, the day on which the Western Powers declared war, he complained that the war had begun 'which, according to the Führer's previous assertions, we had no need to expect before about 1944. . .'. He went on to describe the advantages which Germany would have enjoyed at sea if war could have been delayed till the end of 1944. At that date she could have operated 3 fast battleships, 3 'converted pocket battleships', 5 heavy cruisers, 2 aircraft-carriers and 190 U-boats against British merchant shipping; 6 other battleships could have been used against British heavy forces dispersed in the defence of trade; 2 more battleships and the 2 battle-cruisers would still have been available to tie down the British Home Fleet. The prospects, in Raeder's words, 'would then have been good . . . especially with the co-operation of Japan and Italy . . . of settling the British question conclusively . . .'. As things were, however, the war having come five years too soon, Germany would have to suspend the building of heavy ships and concentrate on U-boat construction. The German Navy would have to avoid all fleet

¹ But excluding the *Schlesien* and *Schleswig Holstein*, which were already over-age.

² These figures are as supplied by the editors of *The Führer Conferences on Naval Affairs*.

actions and concentrate solely on the war against British commerce. It was in no fit state to carry out even this restricted task effectively. 'The U-boat arm is still much too weak . . . to have any decisive effect on the War. The surface forces . . . can do no more than show they know how to die gallantly . . .'

Raeder had been forcibly reminded of the U-boat situation by a memorandum from Doenitz, dated two days before. Unlike the Commander-in-Chief, Doenitz did not resent the fact that the aim of a balanced fleet would have to be abandoned; for him, the U-boat war was the only way of defeating Great Britain in any circumstances. 'The U-boat', he reiterated in his memorandum, 'will always be the backbone of warfare against England and of political pressure on her.' The object of the memorandum was not to regret that war with Great Britain was coming now, in 1939, instead of at a later and more suitable date. Nor did Doenitz subscribe to Raeder's criticism of Hitler on that account. But he was alarmed at the unreadiness of the U-boat Command and determined to press for immediate improvements. With only 26 U-boats suitable for Atlantic operations, only 8 or 9 could be kept in the Atlantic at a time. As against this number, which would constitute but 'a petty annoyance to British trade', he gave his minimum requirement for a successful blockade of Great Britain as a total force of 300 U-boats, a number which would enable him to keep at least 90 at sea at all times in the vital area of the North Atlantic.¹

If the immediate outlook was bad, the prospects were no better. Doenitz calculated that the existing U-boat building programme would produce only 144 Atlantic-going U-boats by the end of 1944, only 178 by the end of 1946; and these figures did not allow for losses. 'It will be quite impossible, if the present building programme is retained, for our U-boats to exercise anything approaching an effective pressure on Britain or her commerce within a reasonable space of time.' He pleaded, therefore, for

¹ Allowing for rest and passage time, 3 U-boats were needed if there was always to be one on patrol.

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special measures, beyond the normal planning and at the expense of all other naval construction, to ensure 'that the U-boat arm can be brought as soon as possible to such a condition as will enable it to carry out its main task; that is, to defeat England in war'.

II

Why was the German Navy so unprepared?

A first obstacle to German naval expansion had been the limitation imposed on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles. The naval clauses of the Treaty restricted the German Fleet to 6 heavy ships, 6 light cruisers, 12 destroyers and 12 torpedo boats, with a limited maximum displacement for each category of ship, and they forbade Germany to own or construct U-boats. Germany remained bound by these clauses until they were replaced by the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of June 1935, which permitted her to build up to 35 per cent of each category of British surface ship and to 45 per cent of British submarines, and by which, so long as the ratio of 35 : 100 for total tonnage was adhered to, Germany also obtained the right to increase to parity with British submarines in certain circumstances, and after negotiation with Great Britain. Even then, however, Raeder could not hope for a rapid expansion of the German Fleet, for a second obstacle came into play. The limited capacity of Germany's ship-building yards—reduced after her defeat in 1918—could not be quickly expanded when Germany was released from the Versailles clauses. It was so limited that even the new building permitted by the Anglo-German Naval Agreement could not have been completed before 1943; and when the war began the German Navy was well within the moderate limits negotiated in 1935.¹

¹ According to Giese, who was assistant adjutant at Raeder's Headquarters, the ratio of 35:100 was proposed by Germany because shipyard capacity would not have allowed greater construction before 1943-4, while the higher and more elastic ratio was negotiated for U-boats because U-boat construction capacity was both less restricted and more easily expanded. See his testimony in *N.D.*, 722-D. For the details of the Anglo-German Agreement see the exchange of notes reprinted in *Brassey's Naval Annual*, 1936, p. 311.

THE REASONS FOR ITS UNREADINESS

Other factors helped to delay the German building programme. Fleets take longer to build than armies and air forces; and Hitler was in a hurry. He was, in any case, preoccupied with Germany's continental position, with Army and Air Force problems. There was, too, a controversy within the German Navy itself as to the form which naval expansion should take, as to whether the emphasis should be placed on achieving a balanced fleet, which was Raeder's policy, or, as Doenitz argued, on U-boat construction. This controversy was reflected in Doenitz's memorandum of 1 September; it continued to cause much bitterness among German naval officers after the outbreak of the war.¹

Taken together, these considerations clearly go some way towards explaining the unreadiness of the German Navy in 1939. But they do not go far enough; they do not go to the heart of the problem. The naval clauses of the Versailles Treaty could have been broken, as was almost every other clause in that settlement, before Germany obtained her release from them; yet, by and large, they were observed until they were replaced in 1935.² When so much else was undertaken in Germany, her ship-building yards could have been expanded if the determination to expand them had been there. Fleets take time to build; but there was a significant delay of more than three years between the signature of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement and the formulation, in the autumn of 1938, of plans for expansion beyond the 1935 figures. As for the controversy in the German Navy, Hitler had settled it in Raeder's favour—in favour of the view that Germany should have a balanced fleet—as early as 1934, when he approved the proposals which led to the Anglo-German Agreement.

These points suggest that Hitler's preoccupation with the Army and Air Force could as easily have been a deliberate policy as the result of a careless neglect of naval affairs; and, if post-war statements are to be believed, this was indeed the case. According to

¹ See, for example, Raeder's memorandum to all naval officers of 11 June 1940. (*N.D.*, 155-C; *Proceedings*, Part 4, p. 264.)

² See Appendix B.

Ribbentrop,¹ Hitler was anxious, up to the autumn of 1938, to recognise British supremacy at sea, to guarantee the integrity of Holland, Belgium and France, and to reach a close alliance with Great Britain by which, in return for German freedom of action elsewhere, as a result of the British abandonment of the thesis of the balance of power, Germany would renounce her colonial claims and would put her small fleet and twelve divisions at Great Britain's disposal for the defence of the British Empire. There is no reason to disbelieve Ribbentrop's statement. It is supported by documentary evidence to the effect that, contrary to the currently accepted view, he was warning Hitler as early as January 1938² that Great Britain would not accept the role assigned to her; would rather fight than tolerate the emergence of a Germany which was as strong as Hitler was planning. And there is testimony from Raeder to show that this was the diplomatic framework within which Hitler's pre-war naval policy took shape.

According to Raeder,³ Hitler, immediately after assuming power in 1933, laid down, as 'the basis for future German naval policy, his strong determination to live in peace with Italy, Japan and England. In particular, he had no intention of contesting England's claim to a naval position corresponding with her world interests, which view he intended to establish in a special treaty concerning the comparative strength of the German and English Fleets. . . The conclusion of the Naval Treaty . . . was initiated wholly by the Führer. . . . His plan was to win England permanently over to a policy of peace through a proportional naval strength of 35 : 100. . . .' Nothing in the evidence at present available from other sources about the Anglo-German naval negotiations conflicts with Raeder's remarks. Germany took the initiative in these negotiations; she did so in the spirit of making a gesture in Great Britain's interest; the German proposals themselves were clearly

¹ *N.D. (C. and A.)*, Supplement B, p. 1178. It is interesting to see that Hess was obsessed with exactly this theme when he landed in Great Britain in 1941. See W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. III ('The Grand Alliance'), p. 46.

² *N.D.*, 75-T.C.

³ *N.D. (C. and A.)*, Statement VII, and Supplement B, p. 1438.

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aimed at reassuring this country on the question of German naval rivalry. Raeder's evidence, moreover, is strengthened by his own admission in the same statement that he was always 'sceptical of the Führer's plan to win England permanently over. . .', and always chafed under the restrictions that the plan imposed on German naval expansion. And this admission is itself confirmed in contemporary documents. In a conversation in June 1934,¹ while Hitler insisted that violations of the Versailles naval clauses must be secret, and thus moderate, Raeder 'expresses the view that in any case the Fleet must be developed to oppose England'.

That this was Hitler's attitude to the negotiation of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement is further supported by his marked reluctance to abandon the Agreement, and order a change of naval policy, when circumstances began to demand this course. It was not until after the Munich Agreement, in the autumn of 1938, according to Raeder,² that he 'began to feel the resistance of England in politics everywhere and to recognise in England the soul of resistance in all the world against Germany'. Even then, he did not at once consider that his policy of settlement with England had failed. But whereas, until then, there is nothing to indicate that he had not been genuinely anxious to limit German naval expansion—at any rate for the time being—to the moderate figures arranged in 1935, in the autumn of 1938 he began to take an interest in reviving the Navy. The beginning of this process, says Raeder, was marked by Hitler's conversion to the view that 'all opportunities left open to us by the ratified treaties should now be used . . . after friendly preliminary negotiations with England'; and use was made in December 1938 of the right to build to 100 per cent, instead of 45 per cent, of British submarines. From October 1938, continues Raeder's statement, 'he impressed on me strongly that every ship built by us must be stronger than the corresponding English ship, and he warned me that we must prepare to embark on a tremendous construction programme'; and it was on Hitler's orders that the new construction programme

¹ *N.D.*, 189-C.

² *N.D.* (*C. and A.*), Statement VII.

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of autumn 1938 was introduced. At the same time, 'in the six-month period beginning in the winter of 1938, the Führer considered the abrogation of the Naval Treaty of 1935'.

But he did not bring himself to abandon the Agreement until the end of the following April; and apart from this pronounced delay, the spirit in which he took this final step throws further light on what he had hoped from it and why he had made it. 'Early in 1939', writes Admiral of the Fleet Lord Chatfield on this point, 'when I was in the Cabinet, the whole Agreement was denounced by this country. This arose soon after our strong protest to Germany against her aggression in the spring of that year. To this protest Hitler asserted that in 1935, when the Agreement was made, Great Britain had agreed to give Germany a free hand in Europe in exchange for her offer to us of the control of the sea.'¹

'This cool assumption', Admiral Chatfield goes on to record, 'had not the slightest foundation in fact.' But politics and diplomacy are apt to proceed by way of negative assumptions when these can profitably be made, and to shun positive assertions when these would be embarrassing. The German negotiators may never have given concrete expression to this idea; but it was not in their interest to do so; and there is no reason to doubt that such an assumption was in Hitler's mind at the time. On the contrary, in the light of the evidence just reviewed, it seems clear that what led him to offer the Agreement, and what he continued to entertain until he finally denounced it on 27 April 1939, was the expectation that it would secure British neutrality while he did his work in Europe. It seems clear that he could have had a better Navy in 1939 had he wished, but that his policy in the pre-war years, and particularly in the vital period between the signing of the Anglo-German Agreement and the winter of 1938, was deliberately to neglect and limit naval preparations with this other end in view.

¹ Admiral of the Fleet Lord Chatfield, *Autobiography*, Vol. II ('It Might Happen Again'), pp. 75-6. This assertion is implicit in the memorandum of 27 April 1939, in which Germany denounced the agreement. For the text of this see *Brassey's Naval Annual*, 1940, p. 265.

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This, and only this, would offer an adequate explanation of the state of the German Navy in 1939. Physical difficulties in the way of naval expansion; controversy in the Navy itself; the fact that he was in a hurry, and could not do everything at once; his undeniable preference for Army and Air Force problems—these other factors contributed, no doubt, to Hitler's pre-war naval policy. But it is probable that they did no more than confirm him in an attitude in which he was already set. In *Mein Kampf*, as early as 1924, he had shown a clear perception of the folly of seeking hegemony in Europe in the face of an antagonised Britain. 'Only with England', he then wrote, referring to German policy before 1914, 'was it possible, with the rear protected, to begin the new German advance. . . . No sacrifice should have been too great to win England's favour. . . .'¹

If this policy required a deliberate neglect of the German Navy, he did not adopt it simply because he failed to appreciate the importance of sea-power; and it is not necessary to assume that he was abandoning German naval claims for ever. He adopted it because he understood sea-power well enough to feel convinced that it would be unwise to bid for it until he had secured hegemony in Europe. Until his continental position was assured, he was determined to avoid what he thought had been the Kaiser's mistake in offering a direct challenge to Great Britain. But there is no reason to believe that peace and friendship with Great Britain would always have been his aim, despite the drift of some German statements since the War.

III

If, and for this reason above all, the German Navy was so unready, if the German Admirals knew it, if Hitler, having taken such precautions on account of British sea-power, was himself so disabused of his earlier expectations by April 1939 that he could

¹ *Mein Kampf*, unexpurgated English edn., Hurst and Blackett, 1939, chap. 14, p. 128.

denounce the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, why did he still take steps which led to the War? Why, when forced to face the facts, to order a change in naval policy, and to recognise that it would be seven or eight years, under the new construction plan, before Germany could obtain, in Raeder's words, 'a certain strength with naval units able to withstand the British Navy'¹—why did he not alter his objectives, or at least delay his programme? Was it simply because he thought he could still rely on a free hand in Europe, despite the change in the British attitude which had led him to denounce the Agreement? Was it because he still did not doubt his ability to attack Poland, the next victim, without the risk of a war with the Western Powers?

This seems the obvious explanation at first sight; and Raeder, at least, thought it was so at the time. His memorandum of 3 September 1939 began by saying that 'the Führer believed up to the last minute that war could be avoided, even if this meant postponing a final settlement of the Polish question'. It went on to say that Hitler had stated that this was his view as late as 22 August 1939, the implication being that Hitler decided not to postpone the attack on Poland because he still believed that war could be avoided with France and Great Britain. In a later letter of 11 June 1940,² addressed to all naval officers, Raeder again announced that 'the Führer hoped until the last moment to put off the threatening conflict with England until 1944-5'. But this is an oversimplified version of the facts; Raeder, in his bitterness, was overlooking the evidence of the previous six months.

Hitler obviously hoped, to the very end, that the Western Powers would not intervene in support of Poland; it is clear that in the early months of 1939, despite some misgivings, he still believed they would not do so if he chose his moment correctly. His methods, after all, had succeeded brilliantly in 1936, 1937 and 1938; he was confident that they would succeed again, that the right moment would arise if he bided his time. In this mood he

¹ *N.D. (C. and A.)*, Supplement B, p. 1439.

² *N.D.*, 155-C; *Proceedings*, Part 4, p. 264.

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risked the 'final liquidation' of Czechoslovakia and, a little later, on 25 March 1939, revealed that he was content to wait before attacking his next victim. He told von Brauchitsch on that date that, although it should be worked on, he did not intend to solve the Polish problem in the near future unless particularly favourable political conditions should arise.¹

This confidence was disturbed and, at the same time, Hitler was forced into action over Poland by Mr Chamberlain's preliminary announcement on 31 March of the Anglo-Polish Mutual Assistance Declaration, followed by publication of the Declaration itself on 6 April. On 3 April, three days after Mr Chamberlain's statement, Hitler issued a directive ordering preparations so to begin that the attack on Poland could take place at any time after 1 September 1939;² on 11 April, five days after the publication of the Anglo-Polish Declaration, he issued a more detailed second directive.³

On the face of it, these directives completely ignored the first definite signs of a revolution in British foreign policy. The first was apparently a scornful retort to Mr Chamberlain's announcement; the second professed Hitler's continued confidence that Poland could be isolated. Annex I of the directive of 11 April, concerning the safety of the frontiers of the Reich and protection against surprise air attacks during the attack in Poland, announced that 'a state of defence or a state of war . . . should not be anticipated'. Annex II declared that 'policy aims at isolating Poland, at limiting the war to Poland, and this is considered possible in view of the internal crisis in France and consequent British restraint'; and it could be more explicit still in another paragraph. 'The great objective', it went on, 'in the building up of the German Armed Forces will continue to be determined by the antagonism of the Western democracies. The attack on Poland constitutes only a completion, by way of precaution, of these preparations. It is not

¹ *N.D.*, 100-R.

² *N.D.*, 120-C, enclosure A; *Proceedings*, Part 2, p. 142.

³ *N.D.*, 120-C, enclosure B. Annex I of this directive is given in enclosure C, Annex II in enclosure D, of document 120-C *Proceedings*, Part 2, p. 143.

to be regarded as in any way the beginning of a military settlement with our opponents in the West.'

But the close chronological connection between the Anglo-Polish announcements and the German directives suggests that it was not confidence so much as anxiety and a wilful determination to be committed which led Hitler to issue the directives when he saw that the British attitude was changing at last; and this suggestion is further strengthened if one considers the sharp contrast between Hitler's statement to von Brauchitsch on 25 March, six days before Mr Chamberlain's announcement, and what we know of his attitude when issuing the directives which followed so soon after that announcement. Von Brauchitsch had been told that he would wait for favourable conditions, but, in spite of what he said in the directives, Hitler could hardly have thought that the British announcement would give rise to particularly favourable conditions for an attack on Poland; and there is evidence that he did not. On 15 April, four days after the second directive, Goering was telling Mussolini that, in Hitler's view, Great Britain could no longer be expected 'to give the authoritarian countries a free hand for the securing of their vital interests',¹ while on 27 April, as already noted, the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, one of the chief measures by which Hitler had hoped to secure a free hand, was formally denounced by the German Government.

Within another month Hitler was openly admitting, in contrast to the confidence expressed in the April directives, that it might be impossible to isolate Poland. On 23 May, in a speech to his Commanders-in-Chief, he recognised that 'the Polish problem is inseparable from conflict with the West. . . . It is not certain that, in a German-Polish struggle, war with the West can be avoided. . . .'² By the beginning of August even instructions to lower echelons were making the same admission. On 4 August naval operational orders declared 'it was possible that, in the event of a conflict with Poland, the Guarantor Powers (France and England) will intervene'.

¹ *N.D.*, 1874-PS.

² *N.D.*, 79-L; *Proceedings*, Part I, pp. 166-70.

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Nevertheless, preparations for the attack on Poland continued without interruption, and Hitler's determination to act in the autumn continued to increase. In the speech of 23 May he announced his decision to attack Poland 'at the first suitable opportunity'—or, rather, since the April directives had already been clear on this point, he confirmed that decision in spite of all the risks. As for the naval orders of 4 August, the fact that they were issued at all provides a further reason for believing that, by then, he had decided to act in 1939, whatever the attitude of the Western Powers. For they carried instructions to two pocket battleships to take up advance positions in the Atlantic, in case Great Britain and France declared war when Poland was invaded. Similar orders to U-boats were discussed by the Naval Staff at least as early as 2 August.¹ Between 19 and 24 August, in accordance with these orders, though no such step had been taken during the Munich crisis of the previous year, two pocket battleships left the Baltic to take up waiting positions in the Atlantic, and 21 U-boats were sent on patrol, most of them to positions off the British coasts.

Thus, by the end of April 1939, Hitler had not only abandoned the Anglo-German Naval Agreement and, with it, the expectation which he had allowed to justify his neglect of the German Fleet, the hope of British neutrality; he had retorted to the British change of front by bringing forward his own intended attack on Poland. If not by then, then certainly by the end of May, despite Raeder's assertions to the contrary, he was no longer confident that the attack on Poland could be isolated from a war with the Western Powers. In spite of this, he chose, not to delay the attack while he undertook belated naval preparations, not to await a better opportunity to strike at Poland or elsewhere, but to proceed undeterred. What, in these circumstances, led him to continue on this course?

¹ See *N.D.*, 126-C; *Proceedings*, Part 2, p. 148, for a letter of 2 August containing instructions to U-boats which were to proceed to the Atlantic, 'by way of precaution', if the intention to attack Poland remained unchanged.

IV

One consideration, of the existence and importance of which there can be no doubt, was the possibility of concluding a Pact with Russia. The Russo-German negotiations began in earnest in April 1939. They were developing during all that subsequent period in which Hitler, losing confidence in the continued neutrality of Great Britain, was casting about for means by which he might still act in 1939. There is no question that these negotiations—and especially the fact they they were begun on Russian initiative—greatly influenced his attitude to the problem created by the stiffening of British opinion. The inter-connection between the stages of the negotiations on the one hand and Hitler's decisions on the other is direct and clear.¹

When the Russian Ambassador called on the German State Secretary on 17 April 1939, so soon after the Anglo-Polish Declaration, he had been in Berlin for months without taking any previous opportunity to discuss politics with the German Foreign Office; he now asked point-blank what Germany thought of Russo-German relations, and said he saw no reason why they should not improve. It seems probable that, in making this gesture, Moscow was itself reacting to the recent Anglo-Polish Declaration; but, whatever the motive, the significance of the gesture could hardly be missed in Berlin. On 28 April there followed Hitler's Reichstag speech, in which he publicised the denunciation of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, and from which he omitted the traditional hostile reference to Soviet Russia. This was followed in Russia by the dismissal of M. Litvinov on 3 May, and on 20 May the Soviet Government offered another encouraging—if tantalising—opening. Asked on that date if Russo-German economic negotiations might be resumed, M. Molotov replied that trade talks could 'only be resumed if the necessary political bases for them

¹ See *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941: Documents from the archives of the German Foreign Office* (U.S. State Dept., 1948), for the following details.

had been constructed'. Three days later came Hitler's speech to his Commanders-in-Chief. The speech was as confused as it was long, but one thing is clear from it: Hitler had decided that, in spite of everything, German policy should be to attack Poland at the first suitable opportunity. A week after this speech, on 30 May, after much previous hesitation, the German Ambassador in Moscow was told that, 'contrary to the policy previously planned, we have now decided to undertake definite negotiations with the Soviet Union'. The instructions concerning preparatory naval dispositions in the Atlantic and the North Sea were issued early in August; but the ships were not ordered to leave the Baltic until 19 August—the day on which the German Government learned for the first time, with any certainty, that Moscow would accept an early Pact.

In the last-minute negotiations which led up to Moscow's final acceptance—on 19 August—of the proposal for a visit by Ribbentrop, and to Hitler's personal telegram to Stalin—on 20 August—asking that the visit should take place as early as 22 or 23 August, Germany forced the pace. Hitler's anxiety to conclude the Pact and to conclude it quickly is unmistakable.

He succeeded; the Pact was signed in Moscow in the early hours of 24 August; and on 22 August, in another speech to his Commanders-in-Chief, Hitler anticipated this result.¹ He told them that the Pact would be signed in a day or two. He also told them that he had always been 'convinced that Stalin would never accept the English offer of alliance'; that, for himself, 'Litvinov's replacement was decisive. [Thereafter] I brought about the change towards Russia gradually.'

But if it was partly because of his expectations of a Pact with Russia that Hitler, assuming that the Western Powers might fight over Poland, nevertheless chose to proceed with his Polish decision, it is also clear that the decision to attack Poland in the autumn of

¹ It is uncertain whether Hitler made only one or two separate speeches on 22 August, for two texts of speeches exist for the same day. I have referred to these throughout as if they were one speech. For the two texts see *N.D.*, 798-PS and 1014-PS; *Proceedings*, Part I, p. 172. For a briefer version, which nevertheless seems to combine points from each of the longer texts, see *N.D.*, 3-1.

1939, announced in the directives of April and only confirmed on 23 May, was made before the Russian negotiations had begun in earnest. The possibility of a Russo-German Pact may well have been in the air since Munich; but it was not Hitler who took the initiative in beginning serious negotiations; and his Polish decision had already been announced when the Russians took that step on 17 April. The fact that he had already made the decision may, indeed, have been the only reason why his obvious reluctance to treat with Russia was overcome. Despite Hitler's statement after the event, it was probably only after much heart-searching that the decision of the April directives was confirmed on 23 May. It was probably as a result of that confirmation that Hitler at last decided to continue negotiations with Moscow. And the instructions sent to the German Ambassador on 30 May leave little doubt that this turning point had only recently been reached. But even if the turning point was reached with Litvinov's dismissal, early in May, as Hitler claimed, instead of at the end of that month, it still occurred after his Polish directives had been issued; and this fact alone is enough to show that, apart from his expectations of a Russian Pact, there was another element in the situation.

This other factor was Hitler's utter determination, after Mr Chamberlain's statement of 31 March, to keep to the new schedule which that change in British foreign policy had led him to adopt: to attack Poland in the autumn.

That this was his attitude has already been suggested on the basis of the close chronological connection between his April directives and the Anglo-Polish announcements. But this does not reveal the full extent to which the Anglo-Polish Declaration not only forced his hand, but also led him to lose his head. There is the further point that, even if he had not obtained a Pact with Russia, he would probably still have attacked Poland when he did.

Reviewing the evidence for this argument, a start must be made by recalling that Hitler issued his directives for the attack on Poland before the Russo-German negotiations had begun in earnest, and by repeating the further fact that, even when he had

so committed himself, it was not on Hitler's initiative, but on Moscow's, that serious negotiations were begun. The next stage is to be seen in the speech of 23 May.¹ Its object was to confirm his decision to attack Poland 'at the first suitable opportunity'; but, if only because his own mind was still not made up about negotiating with Russia, the hope of a successful outcome from the negotiations was only a subordinate factor in this confirmation.

It is true that he was now interested in the outcome of the Russian negotiations; he mentioned that 'a cautious trend is apparent in Russian press comments'; he thought it 'not impossible that Russia will show herself to be disinterested in the destruction of Poland'. But, far from being certain of this, far from being influenced by any hopes of the Russian Pact, he still had to assume that Russia would oppose the attack on Poland; and yet he clung to the decision to make the attack. 'Should Russia', he declared, 'take steps to oppose us, our relations with Japan may become closer. . . . Japan is a weighty problem. Even if at first, for various reasons, her collaboration with us appears to be somewhat cool and restricted, it is nevertheless in Japan's own interest to take the initiative in attacking Russia in good time.' Nor was this all. At a time when he had to assume that Russia might oppose the attack on Poland, he was not only disposed to rely on 'Japan's own interest' to keep Russia quiet; he was so determined to proceed that he swore he would not be deterred by the even worse contingency of an alliance between Russia, France and Great Britain. In this event, he declared, he would still attack, though he might adopt a different strategy. 'I would be constrained to attack England and France [first] with a few annihilating blows.'

These were his views at a time when, far from being certain of securing a Pact with Russia, another week was to pass by before, in the words of the instructions to the German Ambassador in Moscow, 'contrary to the policy previously formed, we have now decided to undertake definite negotiations with Russia'; and to that strong argument for the view that, Russian Pact or no Russian

¹ *N.D.*, 79-L; *Proceedings*, Part I, pp. 166-70.

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Pact, he would still have attacked in 1939, must now be added another. His determination to act and his preparations for action were not affected by the fact that it continued to be uncertain whether the Russian negotiations would be successful.

As late as the beginning of August, relations with Russia were substantially unchanged. The precautionary naval dispositions were decided on at a time when Hitler still could not be sure that Russia would sign the Pact. The orders of 4 August to the pocket battleships stated, in fact, that 'Russia's attitude is uncertain though, at first, it can be assumed that she will remain neutral, but with a definite one-sided leaning towards the Western Powers and Poland. . .'. On the day they were issued the German Ambassador in Moscow summarised the state of the negotiations in the words:¹ 'My over-all impression is that the Soviet Government is at present determined to sign with England and France if they fulfil all Soviet wishes. . . . It will take a considerable effort on our part to cause the Soviet Government to swing about.' Yet the ships were ordered to prepare to move into the Atlantic.

Hitler may well have seen the situation more clearly than his Ambassador; in any case, as already noted, the ships were not actually ordered from the Baltic until a Russo-German Pact was assured. Yet more than a suspicion remains from the wording and date of these naval orders, as well as from the speech of 23 May, that, having abandoned one sound principle on which he had hitherto insisted—the need to keep Great Britain quiet before he attacked in the East—Hitler had become so reckless by the middle of 1939 as to abandon another. It cannot be argued with certainty that he would have attacked Poland when he did, even if the Russo-German Pact had not been concluded. In the event, he secured the Pact. We do not know that he would have done it if he had not secured it; probably Hitler did not know himself. But it does not seem improbable that he would have attacked Poland and risked the consequences, in West and East, even if he had failed to conclude the Pact.

¹ *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941.*

THE RUSSO-GERMAN PACT

Before this is dismissed as hardly credible there is one other piece of evidence to be considered. We should look once again at the Russo-German negotiations, not, this time, from the point of view of their successful conclusion and of Hitler's statement after the event, but in the light of the difficulties and uncertainties which might so easily have prevailed.¹ It is obvious that the dominant note in the negotiations was intense mutual distrust. What is less obvious, but equally substantiated by the documents, is that there were violent oscillations of German policy and threats to the success of the negotiations arising from Hitler's indecision. Between 21 and 26 May, for example, far-reaching proposals were drafted for despatch to the German Ambassador in Moscow which Hitler refused to send because they were too explicit. It is true that, reflecting on his own speech of 23 May, he soon changed his mind, and that the German Ambassador was informed on 30 May that, 'contrary to the policy previously pursued, we have now decided to undertake definite negotiations'. But when the German Ambassador suggested, in June, that a Russian delegate be invited to Berlin 'with all necessary powers', Hitler again ordered a reply which would have put an end to the negotiations if it had been sent. Once again, he wavered and withdrew his order; but it is not too much to say that, had the matter rested with Hitler, the negotiations would probably have failed; and it is not out of place in this context to notice that on 23 November 1939, after the outbreak of war, he regarded it as something of a miracle that he had avoided a war on two fronts. 'It must be made clear', he then declared, 'that, for the first time in 67 years, we do not have a two-front war to wage. That which has been desired since 1870, and which we previously considered impossible of achievement, has come to pass.'²

When this aspect of the Russian negotiations is borne in mind,

¹ See *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941*. For some of the points in this paragraph, see a review of that volume in *Europe in Decay*, by L. B. Namier, who refers to material not included in the volume.

² *N.D.*, 789-PS.

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Hitler's behaviour between May and September 1939, and his eventual attack on Poland, appear in their correct light, as the logical outcome of the position he had taken up in the April directives rather than as a policy dependent on success or failure in the negotiations with Moscow. Long before those negotiations came to a head he was already talking like a man who felt he must attack Poland in the autumn of 1939, whatever happened. At the same time he remained prudent enough to insist that the circumstances at the moment of attack should be made as favourable as possible. Throughout the Russian negotiations, at least after the end of May, it is clear that he was anxious to get the Pact because that would make the circumstances as favourable as possible. It is far from clear that he wanted it because he felt that, without it, he dared not act.

V

This argument is further supported by Hitler's attitude to the Western Powers in the last few months of the peace. The view that, even without the Russian Pact, he would still have attacked Poland in 1939 depends, in the last resort, on the argument that he was carried away by the conviction that war with the Western Powers was inevitable, and that, in those circumstances, time was not on his side; and there is no doubt that this was so.

When, as early as 5 November 1937,¹ he had defined his objective as the expansion of German living-space in Europe, beginning with the 'removal' of Austria and Czechoslovakia, he was already convinced that 'the German question can be solved only by way of force, and this is never without risk'. He was not yet bound to a programme; he was open to consider action under various contingencies; he was prepared to wait for favourable opportunities and to let his actions be decided by them. But he already felt that he must act at the very latest in the period 1943-5: 'it is certain that we can wait no longer.' Even the prospect of

¹ For this—the 'Hossbach'—speech see *N.D.*, 386-PS; *Proceedings*, Part I, pp. 156-63.

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waiting so long, considered as Case 1, was already beginning to seem too risky. 'Should we not act until 1943-5, then any year could bring about the food crisis. . . . Over and above that, the world will anticipate our actions and increase counter-measures yearly. . . . We shall decrease in relative power. . . .' And, in proportion as the need to act before 1943-5 had begun to weigh on him, the possibilities of earlier action, in contingencies in which the Western Powers might be too occupied to intervene, had begun to seem attractive.

These contingencies were considered as Case 2 and 3. Case 2 assumed the outbreak in France of 'an internal political crisis of such dimensions that it absorbs the French Army'; in that case 'the time for action against Czechoslovakia has come'. Case 3 assumed the outbreak of a Mediterranean war between Italy and the Western Powers; should this occur, he was 'firmly decided to make use of it at any time, perhaps even as early as 1938'. 'By exploiting this unique favourable opportunity, he wishes to begin operations against Czechoslovakia.'

Neither of these contingencies materialised. Yet he had not been able to wait; Austria and Czechoslovakia had both been 'removed' by the spring of 1939. Their seizure met with less opposition than might have been expected, and that fact encouraged him to think of further action. Their seizure also met with more opposition than he had hoped, and his dislike of the Munich Agreement was chiefly due to the fact that an agreement had been necessary at all. It soon emerged, moreover, that it had also been carried out at the expense of alarming the world. It hastened the rearmament of other countries; it led to that change in the British attitude which he had hoped to avoid. But this also encouraged him to act again. For it had always been in his mind that Austria and Czechoslovakia were but a beginning; and if Germany were to follow up these successes, it now seemed imperative that she should do so quickly. There was no longer any question of waiting till 1943-5; and it was in this mood that, in the directives of April 1939, he began the planning for an attack on Poland in the autumn.

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The extent to which this decision was influenced by his sense of dilemma in the West is indicated in his speech of 23 May 1939. Far more important than the Russian attitude as a factor in his determination to attack Poland without delay was the problem of relative power between Germany and the West. The most serious argument for early action against Poland that the speech contained was his view that 'a weapon will only be of decisive importance in winning battles if the enemy does not possess it'. 'This', he went on, 'applies to gas, U-boats and the Air Force. It would be true of the Air Force, for instance, as long as the British Fleet had no available counter-measures; and this will no longer be the case in 1940 and 1941. Against Poland, to take another example, tanks will be effective because the Polish Army has no counter-measures. When straightforward pressure is no longer considered to be decisive its place must be taken by the element of surprise and by masterly handling.' With every month, he was convinced, Germany's armaments advantage relative to Poland and the Western Powers would now decline. Germany, moreover, was 'at present in a state of patriotic fervour, which is shared by two other nations, Italy and Japan'; and this might not last for ever. It was for these reasons, rather than because of any hopes of the Russian Pact, that he had decided to press on with his plans.

It was still important to isolate Poland before she was attacked; he was still sufficiently prudent to see this; he had obviously begun to think that a Pact with Russia might achieve this aim. But it was with the problem of isolating Poland from the West, and not from Russia, that he was concerned. 'It is our task', he said, 'to isolate Poland. Success in isolating her is of decisive importance. There must be no simultaneous conflict with the West.' 'An attack on Poland will only be successful if the West does not intervene.' When Poland was attacked there was to be no crossing of the West German frontier by German troops; nothing must be done to incite Great Britain and France to war. In the attack on the West 'it must be our aim to start with a shattering blow. . . but

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this is only possible if we do not slither through Poland into a war with England'.

And yet, as Hitler confessed in the same speech, however carefully he prepared the ground, it was likely that 'the Polish problem will be inseparable from conflict in the West. . . . It is not certain that, in the course of a German-Polish struggle, war with the West can be avoided.' But in this situation, as early as 23 May, before he could be certain that a Russian Pact would be forthcoming, even before he had finally decided to seek a Pact, and when he knew that not even a Russian Pact would definitely exclude the possibility of war by the Western Powers on behalf of Poland, he had no doubt what his course should be. Even if the Western Powers should intervene, the speech continued, 'then it will be better to attack in the West and liquidate Poland incidentally'. 'If it is not certain that a German-Polish conflict will not lead to a war in the West, then the fight must be primarily against England and France.' He intended, in any case, to attack in the West, as well as in the East, in due course; and now 'the Führer doubts the possibility of a peaceful settlement with England'. Therefore, 'we must prepare ourselves for the conflict. . . . The choice is between advancement and decline'.

These arguments were again the chief burden of the speech to his Commanders-in-Chief on 22 August,¹ in which he announced his success in obtaining the Pact with Russia. For though the Pact was gratifying—and important in that, militarily at any rate, it isolated Poland—and though he congratulated himself that 'Poland is now in the position in which I wanted her', this latest development had done nothing to clarify the attitude that the Western Powers would adopt. It had done nothing to resolve Hitler's dilemma in the West. He admitted that he still did not know whether Great Britain and France would come to Poland's support: 'even now one cannot predict it with certainty'. The Russian Pact might deter them from intervention altogether: 'now [in view of the Pact] the probability is still great that the West will not

¹ *N.D.*, 798 and 1014-PS; *Proceedings*, Part I, p. 172.

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intervene. . .'. It was more likely, in Hitler's view, that they would protest in some way, but stop short of war. The Western Powers could only fight Germany by means of the blockade or by direct attack. The blockade would not succeed because of Germany's sources of supply in the East; a direct attack through the Western Front was impossible; Great Britain and France would not dream of attacking through Scandinavia, the Low Countries, Switzerland or Italy. They might declare war, but that would hardly help Poland. It was more likely that they would see this and stop short of war. 'I figure on a trade barrier, with severance of relations. . .'. Ten days earlier he had put the same view to Ciano, telling him that he was 'personally convinced that in the end the Western democracies will shy away from precipitating a general war'.¹ But still the risk remained that they would not be content with a show of disapproval and would decide to fight. Should Germany accept this risk?

He had even less doubt, now, than in May that the risk should be taken. There were many factors in Germany's favour at present and they might not last. 'Probably no one will ever again have the confidence of the whole German people, as I do. . . . But I could be eliminated at any time by a criminal or an idiot. . . .' Mussolini's existence 'is also vital. If something happens to him, Italy's loyalty will be no longer certain. . . .' A third personal factor 'favourable to us is Franco. We can only ask benevolent neutrality from Spain. But even that depends on Franco's personality. . . .' 'All these fortunate circumstances will no longer prevail in two or three years. No one knows how long I shall live. . . .' Then there was the weakness of Germany's opponents. Great Britain had been weakened by the World War. The position in France had deteriorated,

there is no outstanding personality in England and France. . . . Our enemies have no personalities; no masters, no men of action . . . [In any case] we have nothing to lose—we can only gain. Our economic situation is such that we cannot hold out more than a few years . . .

¹ *N.D.*, 1871-PS and 77-TC.

We have no other choice; we must act. . . . Therefore conflict is better now. . . . The initiative cannot be allowed to pass to others. . . . We must accept the risk with reckless resolution. . . . We are facing the alternative of striking now or being destroyed with certainty sooner or later. . . . I am only afraid that some *Schweinehund* will make a proposal for mediation. . . . [There must be] most iron determination on our side. Retreat before nothing. Everybody will have to make a point of it that we were determined from the beginning to fight the Western Powers. . . .

Undeniably, this was a reckless speech; and, with the knowledge that the Russian Pact was about to be concluded, Hitler felt, perhaps, that he could afford to be reckless. But his remarks on this occasion were not inconsistent with his attitude on 23 May, when he could not yet be certain that a Russian Pact would be obtained, or with any of his actions since the previous April. They were the logical culmination of the attitude he had been developing for the last six months. And they serve to bring together the threads of previous arguments.

His attitude towards the Russian Pact is made particularly clear by the fact that the arguments with which, in this speech, he justified the decision to attack in 1939 remained valid, Russian Pact or no Russian Pact, if they ever were valid at all. The Pact made no difference to his estimate of his own importance, or to that of Mussolini and Franco, or to his contempt for Western statesmen. If it was a true argument that Germany could not wait for economic reasons, that she could not afford to lose the initiative, then it would have remained a true argument if there had been no Pact with Moscow—and perhaps it would have even gained in force.

The speech, by being so much the logical culmination of his views since April, if not a mere recapitulation of them, also confirms that the important shift in his attitude occurred at that early date, and that it did so because he was more obsessed by the dilemma in the West than influenced by the Pact in the East. Up till April 1939 he had deliberately starved the German Navy in the hope that, in return, Great Britain would give him a free hand in Europe.

This was to be the prelude for an eventual attack on Great Britain herself; but that did not prevent him from believing that it was a reasonable arrangement. He had gambled on its being accepted, however reluctantly, in this country. And, up to a point, he had succeeded; so much so that he had thought, in Raeder's words, of 'trouble with Poland, France and Russia' from which Great Britain could be excluded. But after April 1939 the situation changed; British opinion stiffened. Was he, then, to be thwarted? He had been right to respect British strength at sea and to try to get round it. But had he not overlooked the purpose to which that strength had ever been applied? Had he not forgotten that, in the last resort, it was always used to prevent that hegemony in Europe which he planned to establish? Was it not obvious, as he said on 23 May,¹ that 'England, which sees in our development the foundation of a hegemony which would weaken her, is the real driving force against Germany'? Did it not seem that, after all, the British question could not be side-stepped? Germany could avoid offering her a direct naval threat; but it seemed that Germany would still have to fight her before she could further extend her dominion in Europe, as Hitler wished. It seemed to be a case of either giving up his further plans for Europe or of fighting Great Britain.

Hitler would never give up his plans. He might delay them—though even that was harsh and unwelcome—if there was anything to be gained as a result. But, if this was the true situation, was anything likely to be gained by delay? Would it not be just as well to attack Poland according to plan and—if it could not be avoided—to have the war with Great Britain? That war had to come some time in any case. And, when one came to think of it, were there not reasons why it might be even better to have it now? 'The quick liquidation of Poland at this moment,' he told Ciano on 12 August, 'would only be an advantage for the unavoidable conflict with the Western democracies.'²

Finally, his remarks on 22 August return us to his pre-war

¹ *N.D.*, 79-L.

² *N.D.*, 1871-PS and 77-TC.

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naval policy and the state of the Navy at the outbreak of war. In his effort to avoid the British problem, he had kept Germany weak at sea; in his desperation to anticipate that problem, once it could no longer be avoided, he took her into a major war for which she was unprepared; and this was because the weakness of the German Navy had come to seem a minor consideration beside those others which fitted with his impatience to act.

But there is no reason to believe that this disadvantage was overlooked altogether. If Hitler was inclined to ignore it, others brought it to his attention. Raeder's memorandum of September 1939 and his letter of June 1940 make it obvious that he had warned Hitler that the German Navy would have no chance of success if war with Great Britain should break out in 1939. On 15 April 1939, discussing with Mussolini the date by which Germany would be best prepared for 'a greater test of strength', Goering had pointed out that 'Germany was comparatively weak at sea'.¹ Mussolini more than once advised his Ally in these last months of peace that it would be better to wait for another two or three years on account of the condition of the German Fleet.²

¹ See 'Notes of a Conference between Goering and Mussolini', on 15 April 1939 (*N.D.*, 1874-PS).

² See the telegram from the German Ambassador in Rome to Berlin on 25 August 1939 (*N.D.*, 1822-PS, item 2).

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST PHASE

I

THAT the Western Powers would not declare war, that they would be content with some less drastic and more formal protest, this was Hitler's hope until the last minute; and all possible precautions were taken to ensure this result. It was for this reason that, on 24 August, hearing that the formal signature of the Anglo-Polish Agreement was about to take place, as it did next day, he cancelled the order, which he had already issued that same morning, to the effect that the invasion of Poland should begin on 25 August. The cancellation took the form of a postponement of D-day until 1 September. The object of the postponement was to enable him to make a last attempt, through the British Ambassador, to persuade the Western Powers to stop short of war.¹ This last-minute effort failed, but Hitler's hope remained alive, as is shown by a further directive of 31 August.² In this final directive he ordered the invasion of Poland to begin on the following morning; but he also insisted that nothing should be done which might incite Great Britain and France.

The responsibility for the opening of hostilities in the West should rest unequivocally with England and France. . . . The German land frontier in the West is not to be crossed at any point without my express consent. The same applies to warlike actions at sea or any which may be interpreted as such.³ . . . Defensive measures on the part of the Air

¹ See, on this point, the evidence of Ribbentrop (*N.D.*, 91-TC; *Proceedings*, Part 10, p. 183), Goering (*N.D. [C. and A.]*, Supplement B, pp. 1105-6), and the Nuremberg trial prosecution (*Proceedings*, Part 2, p. 164).

² *N.D.*, 126-C.

³ This was interpreted by the Naval Staff to mean that the U-boats and pocket battleships already at sea should remain in waiting positions and undertake no

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Force should at first be exclusively confined to the warding-off of enemy air attacks on the frontier of the Reich. . . .

But the directive also assumed that the Western Powers might open hostilities; it could do nothing else, for, even after the conclusion of the Pact with Russia, Hitler could not be certain that France and Great Britain would not declare war. If they did, the task of the Armed Forces, according to the directive, would be 'to uphold, while conserving their strength as far as possible, those conditions necessary for the successful conclusion of operations against Poland'.

These words make it clear, once again, that the importance of the Russian Pact lay not so much in its influence on his decision to attack Poland and risk a general war as in the effect it had in altering his strategy for the first campaign, should a general war break out. In the speech of 23 May 1939,¹ he had thought that, if the Western Powers intervened, 'it would be best to attack in the West and liquidate Poland incidentally', and that, if there were an alliance between Russia and the West, he would 'first attack France and England with a few annihilating blows'. This was easier to say than to do, of course, but his remarks were a clear indication of his state of mind; and that was changed as a result of the Russian Pact. It might fail to deter the Western Powers from declaring war; but it at least made it impossible for them to help Poland; and it turned Hitler's hopes in a new direction and induced him to change his strategy. If the first campaign were limited to Poland, and if Poland were quickly defeated, Great Britain and France, even if they declared war, might still accept a *fait accompli* as soon as Poland was over.²

attacks. The sinking of the S.S. *Athenia* without warning, on the night of 3 September 1939, was a violation of orders by the U-boat commander.

¹ *N.D.*, 79-L; *Proceedings*, Part I, pp. 166-70.

² Apart from the text of the directive of 31 August, Goering's testimony also bears this out (*N.D.* [*C. and A.*], Supplement B, p. 1104). In the same testimony (p. 1119) Goering added the interesting fact that, when he proposed a blitz attack on the British Fleet on the day after the outbreak of the war, Hitler, who had contemplated such a stroke in the speech of 23 May 1939, absolutely forbade it, and issued strict instructions against it.

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In other words, the chief effect of the Russian Pact was not to convince Hitler that Poland could be attacked without a war but to encourage him to believe in the possibility of a short war; and this is confirmed by a comparison of his remarks on 23 May 1939 with those of 22 August, as well as by his strategy for the first campaign. On 23 May, when he was not sure that the Russian Pact would be obtained, he admitted that a war with the Western Powers would not be easy; that, on the contrary, 'it would be a life and death struggle'. 'The idea that we can get off cheaply is dangerous. . . . We must burn our boats. . . . Every government must aim at a short war; we must be prepared, however, for a war of ten to fifteen years duration.' On 22 August, in the speech in which he announced the Russian Pact, he was not only inclined to think that the Western Powers would stop short of war because they could no longer help Poland; he was confident that, even if they did declare war, they would accept the inevitable and make peace when Poland was defeated. 'No one', he said, according to one version of this speech,¹ 'is counting on a longer war. If von Brauchitsch had told me that I would need four years to conquer Poland, I would have replied that it cannot be done. It is nonsense to say that England wants to wage a long war.' In another version this passage is rendered differently, but the upshot is the same.²

Raeder claims that he was 'simply horrified' by the assumption that the Western Powers might still not intervene and that they would accept a *fait accompli* as soon as Poland was defeated.³ But for some time after the British and French ultimatum had expired, and the two countries were at war with Germany, he seems to have shared Hitler's belief in the second possibility. On 7 September, at his first war conference with Hitler, he considered that

¹ *N.D.*, 789-PS and 1014-PS; *Proceedings*, Part I, p. 172.

² *N.D.*, 3-L. In this version the passage reads as follows: 'Von Brauchitsch has promised me to bring the war against Poland to an end within a few weeks. If he had told me that it would take me two years, or even a year, I would not have issued the order to march, and would temporarily have entered into alliance with England instead of Russia. For we cannot conduct a long war.'

³ *N.D. (C. and A.)*, Statement VII.

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Great Britain is unable to draw France into the War unconditionally. France fails to see any war aim and is therefore trying to stay out of the war. After the collapse of Poland, which can be expected soon, it is possible that France, and perhaps afterwards Great Britain, might be ready to accept to a certain extent the situation which has been created in the East.

He therefore proposed, 'in view of the political and military restraint shown by France and the still hesitant conduct of British warfare', that the two pocket battleships in the Atlantic should be withdrawn from operational areas to waiting positions. Because of her greater readiness to accept a settlement, France should be granted especially lenient treatment. 'No offensive action whatever should be taken against the French'; French ships of all descriptions, including warships, should not be attacked; French ports should not be mined. And, because of the generally impartial attitude of neutral countries and the fact that the United States were anxious to preserve the strictest neutrality, U-boat warfare should be restricted by recalling some of the U-boats already at sea and by forbidding attacks on passenger vessels, even if in convoy.

Hitler at once approved these proposals, for they conformed to his own policy; and, when giving his approval, he announced that that policy was to exercise restraint until the political situation in the West had become clearer, which would take about a week.

II

By the time of his next meeting with Hitler, on 23 September, Raeder had begun to suspect that the war against France and Great Britain would have to 'be fought out to the finish'; and he therefore objected to any further prolongation of the restrictions which, for political reasons and at his own suggestion, had been placed on naval warfare. He argued that the pocket battleships ought to be allowed to operate before the beginning of October, before their supplies were exhausted and their morale undermined.

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The prohibition of attacks on French warships should also be removed, especially because it prevented U-boat attacks on the battleships *Dunkerque* and *Strasbourg*, the chief menace to the German pocket battleships. The orders against the mining of French ports were enabling British troop convoys to reach France unmolested, as was the prohibition on attacks on French merchant shipping; and both of these restrictions should also be removed. Because all French merchant ships and British passenger vessels were immune, and because, in accordance with the Hague Convention, U-boats were forbidden to sink British merchant ships without warning and unless definitely identified as such, the U-boats had sunk much less merchant shipping than they could have done, at a time when enemy defences were at their weakest. These restrictions, too, should be abolished and a second wave of U-boats sent to operate with complete freedom against enemy shipping.

Except that he insisted that enemy passenger vessels, if definitely identified, should continue to be immune from attack, Hitler, on 23 September, gave his immediate approval to each of these recommendations; to this extent he had begun to doubt, with Raeder, that the Western Powers would accept a settlement. But his approval of the most important of them, that U-boats should be free to attack enemy merchant vessels without warning, was withdrawn as soon as it was given; and Hitler was more than hesitant towards other and more far-reaching suggestions made by Raeder at this time.

As soon as his first brief hopes had died, Raeder was never in doubt about the importance of giving priority, and at once, to the war against Great Britain. Accordingly, in addition to proposing the cancellation of the special restrictions imposed at the outbreak of war, he pressed Hitler to consider more serious measures, measures which he was convinced would have to be adopted if Germany was to win the war. These measures may be classified under three headings.

First there was the need to extend the war at sea, by every means

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and in contravention of international law, so as to cover attacks on neutral shipping trading with Great Britain. On 23 September he stressed that 'the notorious expression "unrestricted submarine warfare" ' must be avoided and suggested that, instead, Germany should declare 'the siege of England'. This 'would free us from having to observe any restrictions whatsoever on account of objections based on International Law'. On 10 October he extended this argument.

If the war continues the siege of England must be carried out *at once* and with the greatest intensity. . . . All objections must be overruled. Even the threat of America's entry into the war, which appears certain if the war continues, must not give rise to any restrictions. The earlier and the more ruthlessly we begin, the sooner the effect and the shorter the duration of the war. Any restrictions will only lengthen the war.

Raeder's second point was that there must be an immediate increase in the U-boat building programme. On 23 September he claimed that the existing programme would provide only 7 more U-boats in 1939, only 46 in the whole of 1940 and only 10 a month in 1941; and that these figures would not keep pace with anticipated losses. In two weeks' time—if it was then clear that war was to continue in the West—the programme would have to be increased to yield 20 to 30 U-boats a month as soon as possible, even if it had to be done at the expense of other branches of the Armed Forces. On 10 October he again emphasised the necessity of 'a definite concentration on U-boats', and he was by then convinced that 'the U-boat construction programme, which is indispensable and of decisive importance for the war against Great Britain, can be carried out with certainty only by giving it priority over all other programmes'.

In the third place, Raeder made other suggestions of a political nature by which, again, the war at sea might be furthered. U-boats might be built in Russia; they might be bought from Russia and from Italy; bases on the Norwegian coast would be invaluable for operations against British trade.

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Hitler showed little interest in any of these ideas. On 10 October he expressed agreement with Raeder's views on the siege of England, but asked the Commander-in-Chief to prepare a draft manifesto which he could consider before taking action. On 23 September he said he fully appreciated that the U-boat programme must be promoted in every way. But again he asked for a detailed report from the Navy before reaching a decision; on 10 October he asked for another report, this time from the Army, before he would give any orders. The suggestion that U-boats should be obtained in Russia was first referred to the Foreign Minister and then finally rejected by Hitler 'for political reasons' on 10 October. With reference to the acquisition of U-boats from Italy, Hitler contented himself with the statement that 'the Italians will certainly be cautious'. The suggestion about Norwegian bases he said he would consider; but he gave it no attention until the middle of December.

III

Hitler's approval, on 23 September, of Raeder's proposals for the removal of restrictions on the war against enemy shipping was some indication that he had begun to doubt whether the Western Powers would accept the *fait accompli* in Poland. The immediate withdrawal of his approval for the most important of these proposals, that the U-boats should be free to sink enemy merchant ships without warning, was, on the other hand, a sign that he still thought it would be possible to reach an early settlement or, at least, in Raeder's words of 23 September, 'to drive a wedge between France and England'. For the Naval Staff was informed by the Foreign Office on 3 October that the approval had been withdrawn 'in view of the efforts to achieve peace which are now under way';¹ and, as uncertainty on this score could only be ended by a direct suggestion to France and Great Britain, Warsaw having fallen on 29 September, Hitler made peace overtures to London and

¹ *N.D.*, 856-D.

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Paris on 6 October. These overtures were rejected on 12 October.¹

Because the only reason why he had hesitated to remove restrictions on attacks on enemy shipping had been the hope that the Western Powers might still accept a settlement, Hitler had no difficulty in agreeing to the removal of those that remained as soon as his peace terms were rejected. Accordingly, on 16 October, he at last permitted the sinking of enemy merchant ships without warning, that step which he had approved on 23 September, but for which his approval had been cancelled. On the same day he also approved what he had refused to accept on 23 September—that enemy passenger vessels might be attacked as well.

But there was no such change, after 12 October, in Hitler's attitude to Raeder's other proposals. He continued to oppose or to ignore Raeder's suggestions for the siege of England, for an increased U-boat construction programme, for purchases from Russia and for the seizure of bases in Norway; and this is enough to show that, in these instances, his earlier opposition or lack of interest had been due to something more than his reluctance to abandon the hope of an early settlement in the West.

The second and more important reason for his lack of interest in these other proposals was that, even before his peace offer was rejected on 12 October, he had decided what his strategy would be if an early settlement with Great Britain and France should prove impossible; and that Raeder's suggestions were inconsistent with his own decision.

Two alternatives faced him when, his hope of an unimpeded attack on Poland having been frustrated, the possibility also disappeared that the Western Powers would accept the *fait accompli* of Poland's defeat. He could rest on the defensive, refusing to commit Germany to a war in the West unless he was forced to; or he could proceed to the attack on the West which he had always

¹ For the full text of this 'last offer' to the Allies, in Hitler's speech to the Reichstag on 6 October, see *The Times* for 7 October; for Mr Chamberlain's rejection of the offer in the House of Commons 12 October, see *The Times* for 13 and 14 October.

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intended to make in due course. So long as he was allowed freedom of action on the Continent, his plan had been to move east before turning west; since the British change of front he had been uncertain, not whether he would still attack the West, but whether he would attack first in the East or first in the West; and circumstances had at last resolved that dilemma. In the East, Poland had been liquidated and there was the Russian Pact; in the West his enemies were at war with Germany. And these same circumstances persuaded him to choose the alternative of a further attack, rather than a defensive policy. It was true that, in spite of everything, he had 'slithered through Poland into a war with England', but the Western Powers, who had been unable to help Poland, seemed also to be singularly unready for a general war, while the Russian Pact, which had once encouraged him to think that they would not fight, now persuaded him that it would not be too difficult to defeat them. What had seemed the best prescription for success—to isolate Poland, to move east and to attack the West quite separately at a later date—had proved impossible. The next best method—a settlement with the West until he was ready to strike at them in their turn—might well prove impossible like the first. But even then the conditions would still be such that it would be possible to attack them 'with a shattering blow', and especially if he moved without delay.

The only problem, then, was to decide on the strategy for the Western attack. And, since it seemed that the conditions in which he would make it would be similar to those for which he had hoped, his decision conformed to ideas which had long been in his mind. On 23 May 1939 he had said that his aim, when he turned on the West, would be to occupy Holland and Belgium 'with lightning speed', and secure the early defeat of France. He would also try to eliminate Great Britain quickly by 'a final decisive blow', such as an air attack to destroy the fleet. But it was more likely, he considered, that the war with Great Britain would be a long one; and it was therefore essential to secure the command of Western Europe and drive Great Britain from that area.

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If Holland and Belgium are successfully occupied, and if France is also defeated, the fundamental conditions for a successful war against England will have been secured. England can then be blockaded from Western France by the Air Force; the Navy with its U-boats can extend the range of the blockade. England will not be able to fight on the Continent. . . . Time will not be on England's side. Germany will not bleed to death on land. Such strategy has been shown to be necessary by World War I. . . . With a more powerful Navy, at the outbreak of that war, or a wheeling movement by the Army towards the Channel Ports, the end would have been different. . . .

Germany had no powerful Navy now; but 'once the Army. . . has taken the most important positions, industrial production will cease to flow into the bottomless pit of the Army's battles and can be diverted to benefit the Air Force and Navy for the war against Great Britain'.¹

These were the views which Hitler now determined to put into effect, and as soon as possible, if his peace overtures were rejected. They differed from Raeder's at only one point. Both were agreed that the war against the Western Powers, since it had begun, should be pursued to the utmost; that Great Britain was the chief obstacle and that the main objective was, if not to defeat her, then at least to make her accept Germany's control of the Continent. But Raeder was anxious to give priority from the outset to the war against Great Britain, while Hitler was determined to secure his continental position and the defeat of France before he turned his attention or diverted any additional resources to the attack on this country. Thus, when Raeder recommended the abolition of the special restrictions, imposed at the outbreak of war, on attacks on enemy shipping, Hitler could agree; for, although he 'still hoped to drive a wedge between France and England', his hopes were not very high, and to accept Raeder's suggestions was merely to approve the intensification of naval

¹ *N.D.*, 79-L; *Proceedings*, Part I, pp. 166-70. This was not, of course, the first occasion on which he had discussed the idea of an attack on the Low Countries and Northern France. Some such plan had existed as early as 1938, during the Czech crisis (*N.D.*, 375-PS and 448-PS).

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warfare *within the Navy's existing resources*. But when Raeder asked his approval for priority for the siege of Great Britain and for an increased U-boat construction programme, and hinted at the possibility of bases in Norway, his attitude was quite different.

To declare the siege of England would offend the neutrals before he was ready to invade the Low Countries. In any case, it would imply priority for the war at sea; and to concentrate on the U-boat programme would be to divert resources required by the Army and Air Force for the attack on France. Bases in Norway could only be acquired by occupying that country and this would mean a further diversion of effort from the main objective. These suggestions were all inconsistent with the plan and the system of priorities on which Hitler had set his heart. He received them, therefore, with scant attention; he met them with delaying tactics; he proceeded with the execution of his own precise ideas. These were formulated in a memorandum on 9 October and announced in a directive of the same date, three days after his peace terms were issued, three days before their rejection by London and Paris.

The memorandum of 9 October, a lengthy but most able document, was limited in distribution to the three Commanders-in-Chief and the Chief of Staff, O.K.W.¹ After an attack on the principle of the 'balance of power', which had been operated against the interests of the Reich for centuries, it said that the 'very great successes of the first month of the war could serve, in the event of an immediate signing of peace, to strengthen the Reich psychologically and materially to such an extent that there would be no objection to ending the war immediately, so long as the present achievement with arms is not jeopardised by the peace treaty'. But it was not Hitler's object in the memorandum to discuss his intentions if his peace offer was accepted, or 'to study

¹ *N.D.*, 52-L. On internal evidence alone, this memorandum was undoubtedly written by Hitler in person. Post-war testimony by Goering and Jodl confirms this.

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the possibilities in this direction, or even to take them into consideration'. His purpose was to outline his plans should the peace offer be rejected.

In this event, the enemy's object, he was sure, would be the 'dissolution or destruction of the German Reich'. 'In opposition to this, the German war aim must be the final military despatch of the West, that is, the destruction of the power and ability of the Western Powers ever again to be able to oppose the consolidation and further development of the German people in Europe.' And if Germany was to succeed in this aim, he was equally convinced that it would be wise to act quickly.

The military application of our people's strength has been carried through to such an extent that, within a *short* time at any rate, it cannot be markedly improved. . . . Any increase of our military power which can be expected in the next five years will be offset, not indeed by France, but by England, which is constantly growing stronger. . . . In the present situation, under these conditions, time may be reckoned more probably as an ally of the Western Powers than of ours. . . .

Apart from this general consideration, there were particular arguments in favour of immediate action against the West. 'The success of the Polish campaign has made possible a war on a single front, a possibility that has been awaited for decades past without any hope of realisation.' On the other hand, 'the following must be firmly borne in mind: by no treaty or pact can the lasting neutrality of Soviet Russia be insured with certainty. At present all reasons speak against Russia's departure from neutrality, but in eight months, a year, or at any rate in several years, this may be altered. . . .' In any case, 'the greatest safeguard against a Russian attack lies in an obvious display of German superiority and a prompt demonstration of German strength. . .'. Further arguments were recapitulated from his earlier speeches. 'Italian politics will fit in with Germany's so long as the Italian Government sees the future of Italy as a reproduction of a great imperial Roman empire; for this is only to be realised at the expense of France or England and, therefore, with the help of Germany, and is dependent on

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German success.' But if the German success was delayed, Fascist influence in Italy would weaken; if Mussolini should die before it occurred, Fascism would die altogether; and, as 'the hope of Italian support for Germany in its fateful battle depends on the continuation of Fascist influence, time can under no circumstances be considered as an ally of Germany. . .'. If Japan's collaboration was to be assured, the same argument applied. 'Here, too, time cannot be considered as an ally: only success will be.' The argument was much the same in the case of Belgium and Holland; if Germany did not end their neutrality first, then the Western Powers would end it, or force Belgium and Holland to do so. As for the other neutrals, including the United States, their neutrality could be relied on for some months but, beyond that, 'time is to be viewed as working against Germany'.

The memorandum next considered the dangers which would arise for Germany in a long war. States which would be inclined to join her if she were quickly successful might otherwise be drawn in on the other side, or at least persuaded to stay neutral. More important still was 'the difficulty, owing to the limited supplies of food and raw material, . . . of finding the means for carrying on the War'. But 'the greatest and most difficult danger' in any lengthy war was the fact that it would be essential to safeguard Ruhr production, and that 'the enemy knows this too'. The chief problems in this connection would arise from air attack, and 'the longer this war lasts, the more difficult will be the preservation of German air superiority', especially if Belgium and Holland were occupied by the Western Powers.

From this moment the Ruhr, as an active factor in the German war economy, would either drop out or at least be crippled. There is no means of replacing it. But as this weakness is recognised just as clearly by England and France as by ourselves, the Anglo-French conduct of the War, aiming at the utter destruction of Germany, would strive to reach this goal at all costs. Indeed, the less hope England and France have of being able to destroy the German armed forces in a series of actual battles, the more they will try to create the conditions for an effective long-drawn-out war of attrition and annihilation, the more

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certain does it become that they will terminate Belgian-Dutch neutrality...; and the probability, nay certainty, of such an Anglo-French decision is further strengthened by the indisputable fact that, from the opposite point of view, Germany's possession of this area would be one of the few factors which would be any help to Germany in a long war.

In these circumstances, there was everything to be said for invading Belgium and Holland, and for attacking France, at once. Should the War be drawn out even after Germany had made an early attack on the West, an extension of German control in that direction would still prove to be an advantage. For Germany's means of waging a lengthy war were limited to her U-boats and her Air Force. Confined to their existing bases, the U-boats would have to reckon with increasing difficulties if the war lasted long, whereas 'the creation of U-boat bases outside these constricted home bases would lead to an enormous increase in the striking power of this arm'. In the same way the Air Force 'cannot succeed in operations against the industrial centre of England and her south and south-west ports . . . if it is compelled to operate from our present small North Sea coast', but with Holland and Belgium in Germany's possession 'Great Britain could be struck a mortal blow'.

But beyond these considerations, there was the fact that an early attack on the West was probably the only way to avoid a long war. If it was to be made at all, it had to be remembered that 'an offensive which does not aim at the destruction of the enemy forces from the start is senseless' and that 'to attack with weak, and insufficient forces is equally useless'. And such was Germany's present superiority in armaments, readiness and morale that an attack, apart from being preferable to a policy of defence, might be 'the decisive war-winning method'. It might rid Germany altogether of the dangers of a long war. 'Under certain circumstances it might result in a more rapid conclusion of the War . . .'; especially if it were launched in the near future and as an all-out effort.

This memorandum summarised all Hitler's thinking on the

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subject over the past two years; the directive which he issued on the same day, 9 October, and in which he anticipated the rejection of his peace offer, summarised the memorandum.¹ 'If it becomes evident,' it began, 'in the near future, that England, and France acting under her leadership, are not disposed to put an end to the War, I am determined to take active and offensive steps without letting much time elapse.' Hitler had overcome his first disappointment; he was reconciled to the continuation of the War with the Western Powers.

In the next paragraph he put the arguments for assuming the offensive instead of following the waiting policy.

A long waiting period will not only end in the violation of Belgian, and perhaps of Dutch, neutrality to the advantage of the Western Powers, but will also strengthen the military power of our enemies to an increasing degree, cause the confidence of the neutrals in Germany's final victory to wane, and do nothing to bring Italy to our aid as brothers in arms.

The object of the German offensive was then defined. It would be 'to defeat as strong sections as possible of the French Fighting Army, and to acquire as great an area as possible of Holland, Belgium and Northern France'. The purpose of the plan was to obtain 'a base offering good prospects for waging air and sea warfare against England and to provide ample coverage for the vital district of the Ruhr'.

Preparations for the operation were to begin at once; and when the German peace terms were rejected, on 12 October, all Hitler's attention and all German resources were devoted to its execution as soon as possible.

¹ *N.D.*, 62-C.

CHAPTER III

THE INVASION OF NORWAY AND THE FALL OF FRANCE

J

It was Hitler's intention to carry out this ambitious programme at once, before the winter set in. Captured *Notes for the War Diary* record under the heading 'end of September' that he decided 'to attack in the West and this as soon as possible'.¹ On 7 October, two days before the directive was issued, von Brauchitsch ordered Army Group B to make 'all preparations . . . for immediate invasion of Dutch and Belgian territory if the political situation so demands'.² Hitler, in the memorandum of 9 October, announced that 'the attack is to take place in all circumstances (if at all possible) this autumn'.³ The *Notes for the War Diary* record that the attack was at one time scheduled to 'begin at the earliest about 10 November', that Hitler 'is determined, however, to attack in November only if the weather will permit operations by the mass of the Air Force', and that the weather at the beginning of November prevented the execution of the plan. A further directive on the subject, issued as late as 20 November, insisted that 'the state of alert must be maintained for the time being. Only this will make it possible to exploit favourable conditions immediately'.⁴

These repeated delays were distasteful to Hitler. His difficulties were further increased by the knowledge that there was widespread opposition to his plans. *Notes for the War Diary* stated in October that 'the opinion is frequently expressed—by no means shared by the Führer—that an attack in the West is unnecessary; the war

¹ *N.D.*, 1796-PS.

² *N.D.*, 52-L, subsection entitled 'Time of Attack'.

³ *N.D.*, 2329-PS.

⁴ *N.D.*, 440-PS.

could, perhaps, be won satisfactorily if we were to wait a little'.¹ And the opposition was given point by the fact that an attempt was made on his life at this time, though it is uncertain whether there was any direct connection between this particular opposition and that attempt.² But the enforced delay served only to increase his determination to carry out his plans; the unpopularity of his plans only strengthened his conviction that they were right. In a speech to the Commanders-in-Chief on 23 November 1939 the effect on his attitude to the war, both of the repeated delays and of the widespread opposition, is clearly revealed.

The purpose of the speech of 23 November³ was to give his Commanders-in-Chief 'an idea of the world of my thoughts, which govern me in the face of future events. . .'. His first object was to scotch the opposition. There had been, so the speech began, 'numerous prophets who predicted misfortunes, and only a few believers', ever since he had begun his political career in 1919; but he had always been proved to be right and the prophets had always been wrong. 'Providence', his own 'clear recognition of the probable course of historical events', his own 'firm will to make brutal decisions'—these had had the last word and brought him success after success. Now, opposition was rising again against his most recent decision to smash the French; and it was therefore necessary to repeat that the German problem, 'the adaptation of the living-space to the number of the people', would never be solved except by forceful operations of this sort.

No calculated cleverness is of any help; a people unable to produce the strength to fight must withdraw. . . . I did not organise the armed

¹ *N.D.*, 1796-PS. The fact that Hitler wrote the memorandum of 9 October is probably a further sign of opposition, for it was unusual for him to take such trouble. The fact that he also issued his directive on the same day, without waiting to discuss this memorandum, was, on the contrary, very typical of him; and it can have done nothing to reduce the opposition. General Halder in post-war statements provided further information on this point, particularly on von Brauchitsch's opposition to the plan. (See *N.D. [C. and A.]*, Supplement B, pp. 1565-70.)

² The evidence for this is in Hitler's own reference in the speech of 23 November 1939, quoted in subsequent paragraphs.

³ *N.D.*, 789-PS.

OPPOSITION TO THE FRENCH PLAN

forces in order not to strike; the decision to strike was always in me. . . . Wars are always ended by the destruction of the opponent. Everyone who believes differently is irresponsible. . . .

That being the case, it was a question of extending the war at once or of waiting before striking again, and the facts were overwhelmingly in favour of acting at once. There was, first, the Russian Pact.

It must be made clear that, for the first time in 67 years, we do not have a two-front war to wage. . . ; but no one can know how long that will remain so. . . . Pacts are only held as long as they serve their purpose. . . . Russia has far-reaching aims, above all the strengthening of her position in the Baltic. . . . She is striving to increase her influence in the Balkans and towards the Persian Gulf, which is also the goal of our own foreign policy. Russia will do what she thinks will benefit herself. . . . We can oppose Russia only when we are at peace in the West. . . .

It was important to attack the West without delay, not only because Russia might disown the Russo-German Pact, but because Hitler himself wanted, as soon as possible, to be in a position in which he could afford to break it.

Then there were all the arguments he had used in favour of the decision to attack Poland without delay: they were made to do duty again in favour of the decision to extend the war. Much depended on Italy, where Mussolini's death or removal could change everything; and it was 'too much to ask Italy to join in the battle until Germany had seized the offensive in the West'. 'I must also name my own person in all modesty: irreplaceable . . .'; and 'just how easily the death of a statesman may come, I myself have recently experienced. . . . Assassination attempts may be repeated. . . .' A further consideration was that British and French rearmament, though not yet effective, would soon begin to reduce Germany's advantages; and to this must be added the fact that 'America is not yet dangerous to us because of her neutrality laws'. It might be argued that British rearmament would not become effective until 1941; but, as against that, 'I am already disturbed by the stronger and stronger appearance of the English, and there is

no doubt that England will be very much represented in France at the latest in 6 or 8 months. . .'. This raised the problem of Germany's Achilles' heel: the Ruhr. 'If England and France push through Belgium and Holland into the Ruhr we shall be in the greatest danger. . ..'

From all points of view the conclusion could not be avoided that

the moment is favourable now and that in six months it might not be so any more. . . . Now there is a relationship of forces which can never be more propitious, but can only deteriorate for us. Time is working for our adversary. . . . Today we have a superiority such as we have never had before. . . . Therefore no compromise. . . I shall strike and not capitulate. . . . Victory or defeat. . . The decision is irrevocable. . . I shall shrink from nothing and shall destroy everyone who is opposed to me. . . . No capitulation to the outside forces, no revolution from the interior forces. . . .

So far, his arguments were merely a repetition of the memorandum of 9 October, except that delay and opposition had increased his determination to attack. But these also forced him to admit, more clearly than before, that he looked upon his plans as a gamble.

It is difficult for me; [he went on] I am setting this work on a gamble. I have to choose between victory and destruction. . . . I shall attack England and France at the earliest favourable moment. . . . The question whether the attack will be successful no one can answer; everything depends on the favourable instant. . . I shall stand or fall in this struggle. I shall never survive the defeat of my people. . . .

More significant still was the fact that, faced with obstructions, and therefore with the need to produce more telling arguments, he had at last convinced himself that the defeat of France would lead to the end of the war. If it was not in his mind from the beginning,¹ then certainly by 23 November, after six weeks of enforced delay, the hope that the Western Powers would accept a *fait accompli* was replaced by yet another, by the hope that Great

¹ Compare his remark in the memorandum of 9 October (*N.D.*, 52-L.) that 'this plan of action may result in a most rapid conclusion of the war'.

THE EFFECT OF DELAY AND OPPOSITION

Britain would surrender if the attack on France came soon enough and was sufficiently overwhelming.

Only this can explain some of his remarks at the end of the speech. 'The enemy', he declared, 'will not make peace when the relationship of forces is unfavourable for us.' He would attack France at the earliest moment because 'I consider it possible to end the war only by an attack. . .'. After seizing Holland and Belgium he could sow mines off the English coast and 'this will bring England to her knees . . .'. The decision was a difficult one; but 'the whole thing means the end of the World War, not just of a single action'. It was true that no one could say whether the attack would succeed; but 'only he who struggles with destiny can have a good intuition'. 'I have experienced many examples of intuition and, even in the present development, I see the prophecy . . .'

At the end of November he again expressed his opinion that 'the attack in the West will lead to the greatest victory in world history';¹ and it was, no doubt, because his hopes were so high that, in spite of the severe winter, he remained determined to put his gamble to the test as soon as possible. Even in December, according to the *Notes for the War Diary*, 'Hitler, as always, still continues to think it desirable to carry out the attack in the West as soon as possible, and not to delay until the spring'; and the same document records that 'introductory movements for the big attack were ordered anew by Hitler' at the beginning of January 1940, only to be checked again by the weather.² The file of orders and counter-orders for D-day and H-hour continued up to 13 January 1940, the last specifying 20 January as the probable D-day.³

By then, however, his plans had been complicated by the need to consider the invasion of Norway, and this fact, together with the continued bad weather, at last induced him to postpone the attack on France until the spring.

¹ *Notes for the War Diary* (N.D., 1796-PS), under the heading 'End of November, 1939'.

² N.D., 1796-PS.

³ N.D., 72-C.

II

With Hitler so convinced that everything hung on the French assault, and so determined to seize the first opportunity to begin it, it is not surprising that, initially, he regarded the invasion of Norway and Denmark as an unwelcome addition to his plans. It was Raeder, not Hitler, who first made the proposal that bases should be seized in Norway; and the proposal conflicted at first sight with the strategy which Hitler had adopted. Apart from the effect which the invasion would have on neutral opinion, it would clearly entail a diversion of German resources at a time when Hitler was convinced that they should all be concentrated on the main objective. Accordingly, it was chiefly on Raeder's initiative that the proposal was kept alive in its early stages; and Hitler adopted it only when it became obvious that, unless Norway was occupied in conjunction with the attack on France, the Allies, landing there themselves, might thereby revive their fortunes, create serious diversions for Germany on another front and deprive the planned defeat of France of its intended finality.

In his original questionnaire on the subject on 3 October 1939, addressed to the Naval Staff,¹ and when he first mentioned Norway in conference on 10 October,² Raeder used arguments which were hardly likely to impress Hitler. What he emphasised was that bases in Norway would be valuable for the U-boat war, indicating that he regarded Norway as the area for an offensive stroke and its invasion as a move in the siege of Great Britain. Hitler, already preoccupied with his own plans for the invasion of the Low Countries and the defeat of France, was reluctant to consider large-scale operations elsewhere; was uninterested, for the time being, in the siege of England or the U-boat war. He undertook to think about Raeder's suggestion; but the subject was not mentioned again for another eight weeks.

Meanwhile, Raeder took the initiative, with the help of

¹ *N.D.*, 122-C.

² *N.D.*, 879-D.

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Rosenberg,¹ to discover whether the invasion of Norway could possibly be carried out economically, using fifth-column methods. Eventually on 11 December, he interviewed Quisling and Hagelin in Berlin; on 12 December, he reopened the subject with Hitler. Thanks to his talks with Quisling, and to the outbreak of the Russo-Finnish War at the beginning of December, he was then able to use more telling arguments in favour of his scheme. Quisling's evidence indicated that there was a great opportunity, as Raeder put it, 'for a political coup'; the operation need not be so large a military diversion as Hitler suspected. Raeder now emphasised, moreover, not the value of the naval bases that Germany would acquire, but the growing danger that Great Britain, if only in view of her concern for Finland, might soon invade Norway herself if she were not forestalled. 'It must be made impossible', he argued, 'for Norway to fall into British hands, as this could be decisive for the outcome of the War.' An Allied occupation of Norway would carry the war into the Baltic, block the North Sea and Baltic movements of German ships, and increase Germany's vulnerability to air attack. It would destroy Germany's sources of iron ore in Norway and Sweden, which were expected to supply 11,550,000 out of Germany's estimated total consumption of 15,000,000 tons in 1940.²

Hitler was impressed with the evidence that the operation need not be too difficult; he also agreed with Raeder that an Allied occupation of Norway would be 'unacceptable'. He consented to see Quisling, who was introduced to him by Raeder on 14 December. If he was not at once convinced of the necessity for the operation, he became so in the next few weeks.³ Two plans

¹ For Raeder's share in these preparations see the testimony of Giese (*N.D.*, 722-D), who explained that he made frequent appointments with Raeder at this period for Hagelin. For Rosenberg's share see his report in *N.D.*, 004-PS.

² I have taken these figures from the editors of *The Führer Conferences on Naval Affairs*.

³ At the end of the War Raeder stated that Hitler decided on the operation about 12 December, after receiving reports from Rosenberg (*N.D.*, 1546-PS). *Notes for the War Diary* (*N.D.*, 1796-PS) record that 'the Führer made up his

were put in hand, one assuming a successful political coup by Quisling, the other—in the event of Quisling's failure—envisaging an assault by land, sea and air, with probable resistance from Norway and Great Britain.

Once his initial reluctance had been overcome, or—what is more to the point—when an immediate attack on France was seen to be impossible, it was Hitler who provided most of the determination to proceed against Norway. The last order for an immediate attack on France was issued on 13 January; the first actual step for the attack on Norway was on 27 January. It is probable, on account of the fact that he still remained uncertain whether to attack France or Norway first, that the weather, rather than his new interest in Norway, was the chief reason for the postponement of the French operation;¹ and it seems to be the case that, after 27 January, when he set up a working staff under Keitel to plan the Norwegian campaign,² he still wavered about the early seizure of Norway. But the interception of the *Altmark*, a German supply and prison ship, in Norwegian waters by British destroyers on 17 February, by infuriating him, put an end to his hesitation. On 19 February, according to Jodl,³ he 'presses the proposals energetically'; on 1 March he issued the first directive for the occupation of Norway and Denmark by force; on 3 March, again according to Jodl, he 'stressed the need for prompt and strong action against Norway: no delay'; and on the same day he finally settled the problem of schedule by deciding that Norway should be attacked before France, with several days interval.

In the directive of 1 March⁴ the Norwegian operation had at last been reconciled in Hitler's mind with his central and more important plan for the defeat of France. Its chief object was to

mind to utilise the Danish and Norwegian space for German warfare' under the heading 'middle of January, 1940'.

¹ Jodl in a lecture in November 1943 (*N.D.*, 172-L) claimed that the postponement was 'mainly due to the weather but in part also influenced by our armaments situation'. ² *N.D.*, 63-C.

³ For this and subsequent references to Jodl's diary see *N.D.*, 1809-PS. 19 February was two days after the *Altmark* incident. ⁴ *N.D.*, 174-C.

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prevent British encroachment in Scandinavia and the Baltic. But the forces to be employed were still to be kept as small as possible, 'numerical weakness being balanced by daring action and surprise execution'; and the effect of the move on neutral opinion had not been forgotten. 'In principle', continued the directive, 'we will do our utmost to make the operation appear as a *peaceful* occupation, the object of which is the military protection of the neutrality of the Scandinavian States.'

If these last two points reveal that his chief concern was still for the attack on France, the first provides the reason for his interest in Norway and explains why he had reconciled the Norwegian plan with his major objective. Apart from the obvious defensive need to forestall an Allied occupation of Norway,¹ he was anxious to prevent any move which would deprive the planned defeat of France of its intended finality. This, at least, is what he told von Falkenhorst on 21 February when appointing him in charge of the Norwegian invasion. 'The success,' he said, 'which we have gained in the East and which we are going to win in the West would be annihilated by a British occupation of Norway.'²

Up to the middle of March Raeder was equally determined. On 9 March, indeed, he warned Hitler of the risks: 'the operation is contrary to all the principles of naval warfare, according to which it would only be carried out if we had naval supremacy.' But he was confident, nevertheless, that the operation would be successful, given complete tactical surprise; and he was convinced that it was imperative to attempt it, if only because 'the British now have the desired opportunity, under pretext of supporting the Finns, to send troops through Norway and Sweden and therefore to occupy those countries if they wish'. A few days later, however, becoming less anxious about an imminent British landing in Norway, the Commander-in-Chief, Navy, began to hesitate. On 14 March,

¹ This was a real danger, even if it had temporarily receded by the time the German invasion was launched. For Allied plans for landings in Norway see W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. I ('The Gathering Storm'), chaps. xxx, xxxi, and xxxii.

² *N.D. (C. and A.)*, Supplement B, ('Interrogations'), p. 1537.

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according to Jodl, he 'wondered whether it was still important to play at preventive war in Norway and whether it would be better to launch the Western offensive first'; he was also 'afraid that the English will get a foothold in Narvik' if Germany invaded Norway. On 15 March Jodl himself noted that 'worries that England will proceed against Norway are reduced; such action no longer seems probable'.

At this stage it was Hitler who again provided the necessary firmness. On 26 March, according to Jodl's diary, 'Hitler sticks to it: Norway first'. This was an unwelcome decision in some quarters; 'individual naval officers', wrote Jodl on the next day, 'seem to be lukewarm about the invasion of Norway, and the three chiefs in charge of the operation are also pondering matters which are none of their business'.¹ But Raeder himself, bolstered up by Hitler's firmness, accepted it. At his conference with Hitler on that day he repeated that a British landing in Norway, which had once seemed imminent, no longer appeared to be so; but he agreed that Great Britain would still make the attempt in due course if she were not forestalled; and, since Germany would thus be forced to execute her own invasion plan some day, he argued that it would be best to act as soon as possible, especially because the nights would begin to get too short after mid-April.

At this meeting Hitler provisionally accepted 7 April as the date for the attack; and this was altered, on 1 April, to 9 April, the day on which in due course the German landings took place.

III

If the occupation of Norway and Denmark was regarded for long as an unwelcome addition to Hitler's master-plan, it is not surprising that less pressing claims, like those of the war at sea, received little or no attention until he had launched the attack on France.

Apart from the occupation of Norway, the most important

Jodl's diary (*N.D.*, 1809-PS).

requirement of the Naval Staff was an increase in U-boat building. This could only be met at the expense of the Army and Air Force preparations for the invasion of Norway and the attack on France; and nothing was done to meet it. In spite of repeated arguments and complaints from Raeder, the U-boat construction programme was no more extensive in June 1940 than it had been at the beginning of the War; and even the existing programme was behind schedule, having suffered from the priorities granted to Army and Air Force orders.

Raeder began his fruitless campaign for increased U-boat building on 1 November 1939. He told Hitler that the programme had 'not yet been given priority', and complained that he was constantly being put off with the argument that 'the replenishment of Army equipment and ammunition supplies is of prime concern at the moment'. Hitler decided to reconsider the matter in December; Raeder, after noting in the minutes of this meeting that 'continuous pressure will be necessary if the large-scale building programme is to be carried out', continued to point out that losses were keeping pace with replacements under the present programme. On 22 November he presented a scheme for an extended programme which would yield 29 U-boats a month by October 1942. On 8 December he complained that even the existing construction programme would be delayed because allocations for U-boats had been reduced for the first quarter of 1940. On 30 December negotiations were still in progress with the Army to discover whether the proposed extension of U-boat construction could be carried out, and Hitler decided to postpone his final decision until May or June 1940.

Hitler explained his reasons for this decision when Raeder, on 26 January 1940, again complained that the Army ammunition programme was delaying U-boat construction. He replied that 'increased production in the Ruhr is essential for any type of warfare and it is important for the war against Britain to broaden the territory from which to launch an attack. The measures necessary for this will have to be taken first. France must be

beaten and the British deprived of their base on the Continent.' This was still his attitude after the beginning of the attack on France. On 21 May 1940 he assured Raeder that he would concentrate on the U-boat programme 'when the main operations in France are over'. On 4 June, he repeated that he would decrease the Army and give priority to Navy and Air Force programmes 'when France has been overthrown'.

Raeder met with a similar lack of response when he criticised the German Air Force and complained of its failure to support the Navy in the war against Great Britain. He began by explaining, on 22 November 1939, that the attack on British trade, owing to the Navy's weakness, depended to a great degree on the adequate expansion of naval air forces; and he hoped that Hitler would support him in negotiations with the Commander-in-Chief, Air. On 8 December he stressed the urgent need for the German Air Force to increase its attacks on convoys; and Hitler went so far as to promise that he would 'work in this direction'. But Raeder was still pressing this point on 26 January 1940; was, indeed, so disappointed with the progress made as to complain that he had 'gathered the impression . . . that the general conduct of the War is at present strongly influenced by "continental ideas".' Hitler met this complaint with the arguments he had used against the demand for more U-boats: France must be beaten before Germany could turn her attention to the war against Great Britain.

Further controversy developed between the Navy and the Air Force over the use of aircraft for minelaying. The German Air Force had been much used for this purpose in the early months of the War; but its operations had since been greatly reduced in preparation for the Norwegian and French offensives. On 26 March Raeder urged the immediate resumption of aerial minelaying to counterbalance the present lull in U-boat warfare. Hitler was inclined to support Raeder in this issue and undertook to reach a decision in the next few days. The Air Staff, on the other hand, was determined not to resume minelaying operations until the beginning of the attack on France; and Hitler's intervention—if

he did intervene—had little effect. On 29 March Raeder demanded a decision on the resumption of aircraft minelaying operations; Hitler again undertook to take up the question with Goering. On 26 April however, Raeder, was still urging that aerial minelaying must be increased. On 7 May, three days before the invasion of the Low Countries, he declared that, 'if the Air Force had shown more interest, the Thames could have been mined in the past few weeks'. The Air Force had had its way; and Raeder suspected that, even when the land offensive began, the Commander-in-Chief Air 'will not have time and interest for mine warfare'. This was the preface to an inevitable and familiar demand: the Navy should have its own aircraft. Hitler did not treat this seriously: he merely replied that Goering had recently presented the opposite view, had justified the unification of all air units under one command.

In his attempts to increase the resources—U-boats and aircraft—employed in the war at sea, Raeder had no success at all; he was more successful in the effort to intensify the war at sea with the existing resources. But even here his success was incomplete and slow in coming. If his suggestions did not conflict with the strategy laid down by Hitler they were at once approved; but if they were inconsistent with Hitler's plans—or if Hitler thought they were—they fell on deaf ears or were rejected out of hand.

As soon as his peace terms were refused, Hitler, as we have seen, was ready to remove, without delay, most of the remaining restrictions which limited the attack on enemy shipping. On 16 October 1939, at Raeder's request, he finally approved of the sinking of enemy merchant ships without warning and also agreed to let enemy passenger vessels be torpedoed on short notice.¹ On 10 November he went one step further with Raeder, approving the sinking of enemy passenger vessels without warning; and, from then on, German warships enjoyed almost complete freedom from regulations in their attacks on enemy shipping.

¹ Raeder pointed out that passenger vessels were already being torpedoed without warning if proceeding without lights or in convoy. These extensions of the war at sea may be studied in detail in *N.D.*, 100-C.

Raeder had already turned his attention to the problem of extending the war at sea to permit attacks on neutral traffic trading with Great Britain, a subject which he re-opened in a memorandum of 15 October.¹ 'All that is lacking now', he added on 1 November, 'is the declaration of a state of siege against England, in which case neutral ships could also be torpedoed without warning once the neutral states have been notified.' But Hitler was determined to avoid incidents with neutrals in advance of the Western offensive and, for the moment, Raeder accepted the force of this argument. 'The moment for the declaration of the state of siege', he concluded on 1 November, 'will depend on . . . the time and nature of Army operations. Should these violate the neutrality of neutral states, then the appropriate moment for the most drastic measures on the part of the Navy will also have come.'

Before his next meeting with Hitler, realising that the Führer would not budge from his position, Raeder decided to adopt a different approach. On 10 November he suggested 'putting off' the proclamation for the time being and continuing gradual intensification, step by step, instead'. As a first step, to be taken at a time to be decided later, he thought the Navy might be allowed to sink without warning 'neutral ships definitely known to be carrying contraband . . . e.g. Greek ships'. Once again, Raeder was foiled. His proposal, it was decided, would be 'brought up for consideration as soon as there is any change in the attitude of neutral countries; for example, in the event of an offensive'. Hitler was just as firm when Raeder, in order to reopen the question on 22 November, enquired about 'future political and military developments to justify a further intensification of the U-boat war'. 'The coming land offensive', was the reply, 'will give rise to protest from the enemy and neutrals alike. . . . It must be decided after the beginning of the offensive whether the naval war is then to be intensified.'

Another opportunity was offered to Raeder when, on 27 November, by Order in Council and as a reprisal for the German use of

¹ *N.D.*, 65-UK.

magnetic mines, the British Government extended the blockade to cover German exports; only German imports having formerly been subject to contraband restrictions. On 8 December Raeder pressed for German counter-measures, preferably in the shape of the declaration of siege. But Hitler again confirmed that this could only be considered in conjunction with the coming land offensive. He took the same view on 30 December, when Raeder suggested that neutral ships in the Downs should be attacked by the German Air Force after a previous warning to neutral governments: a favourable moment for such a warning, was Hitler's reply, would be the beginning of the general intensification of the War. At the same meeting he repeated that he also intended to withhold the publication of a reply to the British Order in Council until that time.

This reply, in the shape of a draft declaration of the siege of Great Britain, was prepared by the Naval Staff in the last few days of 1939.

England [it read] is our deadly enemy. Her object is the destruction of the German Reich and the German people. Her methods are not open warfare but vile and brutal starvation. . . . We Germans will not allow ourselves to be starved, nor will we capitulate. Returning like for like, we will make Britain herself feel what it means to be besieged. . . . Any ship encountered in the combat around Britain and France, regardless of its flag, exposes itself to the dangers of warfare.¹

But this declaration was never issued. If Hitler would not consider its publication before the opening of the Western offensive, its publication had become unnecessary when the offensive was finally launched.

For, in spite of Hitler's continued refusal openly to affront the neutrals until he was ready to launch his land offensive, and in spite of his original opposition to Raeder's piecemeal proposal, Raeder had meanwhile met with considerable success in his plan to extend and intensify the war by stages and without advance warnings.

¹ For the full text of this draft see *Führer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, the last item in the volume for 1939.

One method of doing this was for Germany to declare a minefield, without necessarily laying mines, and to permit U-boats to sink all ships without warning in the area where the blame could be put on the mines. This was first proposed on 22 November, Raeder explaining that its purpose would be 'to combat enemy military traffic and not to disrupt neutral shipping'. Hitler approved of the suggestion at once; it was put into force in an area north-west of Scotland on 1 December; another area was soon added in the Bristol Channel. On 26 January 1940, 'since the Führer has agreed in principle to defining areas off the British coast in which neutrals may also be sunk without warning, so long as it is possible to put the blame on mines', Raeder proposed even further extensions of the scheme, to which Hitler also agreed.¹ Another method was openly to allow the sinking of ships belonging to certain neutrals, as first suggested by Raeder on 10 November 1939. When it was first suggested Hitler had refused to consider it, but on 30 December 1939 he agreed that the ships of all nations which sold or leased ships to Great Britain, primarily Greek ships, could be torpedoed without warning.

Thus, although Hitler remained firmly opposed to any open breach of neutrals' rights and to any public declaration of the siege of England, his objection to less open methods of extending the war was gradually overcome; and Raeder could be well satisfied with the progress made by piecemeal methods. On 26 January 1940 he explained that 'gradual intensification has continued to justify itself. Political difficulties have been entirely avoided in this manner.'

But Hitler never ceased to be anxious that political complications should be avoided. In particular, his approval of any method of extending attacks to neutrals had been qualified by the understanding that the attacks would be limited to the American declared zone, an area which United States shipping was forbidden to enter and in which there could therefore be no incidents with the United States. On 23 February 1940, when Raeder proposed a further

¹ For the extension of this scheme see *N.D.*, 21-C.

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extension of the war at sea, in the shape of an operation by two U-boats off Halifax, Hitler firmly refused to consider it 'in view of the psychological effect on the U.S.A.' Raeder regarded this refusal as 'a real setback to the effectiveness of U-boat warfare'; but Hitler would not be moved. He could see no objection to attacking enemy shipping by every available means; he was prepared to let neutrals be sunk if the pretext was good enough, if the circumstances were sufficiently obscure. But anything like an open declaration of siege and, except in the case of Norway and Denmark, any operation which might affront neutral, and particularly American, opinion, was banned until he had launched the attack on France.

IV

The invasion of Denmark and Norway was brilliantly executed, and at great speed. By the end of the first day Denmark and most of Southern Norway were in German hands. Within six weeks the Allied position in North Norway had been rendered hopeless and the German occupation of Norway was almost complete. It was followed, a month after it had begun, by the German invasion of Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg on 10 May and the beginning of the attack on France. This was equally successful. Hostilities ceased in Holland on 15 May; Belgium surrendered at midnight on 27-28 May; by that time the German armies had broken the Allied front and reached Boulogne. The evacuation from Dunkirk took place between 26 May and 4 June. Before the end of June the campaign was at an end; and so, with the French surrender, was another phase of the War.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that, up to this point, Hitler's strategy was based on a sound appreciation of all the circumstances. For the war against Great Britain, rightly regarded by Hitler as the major problem, the occupation of Norway and the defeat of France were far more effective than anything that Germany could have achieved by other methods in the same period.

It is true that Hitler's policy imposed serious restrictions on the

attack on British trade; the preparations for the attack on France, combined with the invasion of Norway, for which purpose Germany's heavy ships and U-boats were all diverted, made operations against Great Britain virtually impossible for two months. It is also true that serious losses were inflicted on the German surface fleet during the operations in Norway.¹ And despite the fact that the plan for a balanced fleet had been abandoned at the outbreak of war, all work stopped on surface ships, except those nearing completion, and all available resources switched to a revised U-boat programme, U-boat building suffered as well as operations: in the whole of the first year of the War only 35 Atlantic-going U-boats were completed, while 28 were lost at sea.

But the limited nature of Germany's attack on the trade routes in the first twelve months of war was due as much to the size of the fleet with which she began the War, to the lack of capital ships and to the inadequate number of U-boats then available, as it was to the strategy which Hitler pursued in the first nine months. The lack of a surface fleet could never be rectified once the war had begun; and the losses in Norway only made a serious problem slightly worse. U-boats take time to build and even longer to work up,² so that the largest of building programmes, instituted as soon as the War began, could not have been decisive in the period up to the fall of France. Taking these considerations into account, as Hitler must have done, it seems unlikely, given the greatest possible concentration on the war at sea and the total employment of all other resources—including the German Air Force—against British shipping, and even allowing for Great Britain's comparative defencelessness in the early months, that the result would have been as crippling to the British position as were the effects of the seizure of Norway and the French defeat.

For these German successes on land were of immediate and

¹ These losses are indicated in Appendix A, para. 2.

² In the revised programme of September 1939 a construction period of 21 months was envisaged, so that the U-boats then ordered could not be counted on operationally for more than 2 years.

immense importance, not only for the War as a whole, but also for the war at sea. British escort forces were seriously depleted in the operations in Norway and the evacuation from Dunkirk; the considerable escort forces of the French Fleet were eliminated altogether. The U-boats left the Baltic and the North Sea for bases in Biscay, and their effectiveness was almost doubled by the reduction of their time on passage and the extension of their area of effective operation. The German occupation of the Channel ports and, more particularly, the transfer of the German Air Force to new forward bases led to an increase in British shipping losses on the East Coast. We were soon forced to discontinue routing ocean convoys through the English Channel or south of Ireland and to send them to West Coast ports by the North Channel or round the north of Scotland. These and other lengthy diversions from the previous trade routes, including the virtual closing of the Mediterranean following Italy's entry into the War, were a serious drain on our limited shipping space. If, in spite of the limitations imposed by Hitler's strategy, the battle on the trade routes was serious enough for Great Britain in the first year of the War, the last three months of that first year, June, July and August 1940, were more disastrous, as a direct result of the fall of France, than all the previous nine. And Germany achieved at least as much in those months against British trade, as a result of Hitler's successes, as she would have done if Raeder's policy, and not Hitler's, had been followed.

The importance of concentrating from the outset on the war at sea, instead of on continental victories, would, in fact, have lain not so much in the possibility of decisive results in the first year as in the effect of the early build-up on the Battle of the Atlantic in 1941. As against this, however, the defeat of France also had long-term, as well as immediate, consequences for the Battle of the Atlantic.

The reduction of British escort forces, the loss of the French Fleet, the seizure by Germany of U-boat and air bases in the forward area, the enforced diversion of Great Britain's limited

shipping—all these developments, if they led to an immediate deterioration in the British position, also had a permanent effect of incalculable importance on the war at sea. There is no way of comparing these gains to Germany with the advantages she would have come to enjoy in 1941 if Hitler's policy had been to concentrate from the outset on the battle for the trade routes, instead of on the occupation of Norway and the defeat of France. But, granted that he could not, at once, have done both, it is difficult to argue that he could have done better.

There were, moreover, other things to be considered, besides the war at sea. The defence of Germany was a vital consideration in the planning of any offensive against Great Britain. The invasion of Norway was a defensive move to forestall the danger—the real danger—of a British occupation. The defeat of France, apart from the positive gains which resulted, drove Great Britain from the Continent, with all the consequences that that implied for German defence, economy and freedom of manoeuvre. Great Britain's exclusion, simultaneously, from Norway and France extended Germany's possibilities of resistance and manoeuvre to enormous lengths. To this must be added another consequence of Germany's success: the entry of Italy into the War and the opening up of possibilities in the Mediterranean.

Further still, there was the chance that these successes would induce Great Britain to sue for peace. This hope was certainly an element in his plans—how large an element was soon to emerge—just as the possibility that the Western Powers might accept a settlement after the defeat of Poland had been a factor, if not in his decision to go to war, at least in his strategy for the first phase. The second hope was, like the first, to be belied; but the calculation that Great Britain might give in, if it did not prove accurate, was not unreasonable. To have had it in mind was, perhaps, to be aiming high; but there is nothing wrong in doing that.

Hitler's strategy up to the fall of France was thus not merely defensible; it was, in all the circumstances, eminently sound and correct. It was also eminently successful; for, based as it was on

an accurate estimate of the unreadiness of the Western Powers, it reaped the benefit, not only of being right, but of being the right thing at the right time. Apart from Germany's preparedness, in comparison, at any rate, with the unreadiness of the Western Powers, a large measure of shrewdness, judgement and acumen, as well as of forceful determination, lay behind its success; and though there was also a large measure of good luck,¹ this should not be allowed to hide those qualities.

On the other hand, if only because of that unreadiness, his success, however complete, had not been an adequate test of Hitler's strategical powers. The defeat of France completed the easy period of Hitler's war. Thereafter, the position became totally different, the situation far more complex. The problems facing Germany, no less than Great Britain, were problems of a different order from, of vaster dimensions than, those which had been met before. The new situation presented Hitler with almost limitless possibilities. But it also brought him up against hard facts: against the problems of distance, the disunity between Germany and the other Axis Powers, the lack of a German Fleet, the British command of the sea. Arising from the new opportunities, the dangers were false hopes and *embarras de choix*; the solution of the new problems required the most careful planning, and the nicest calculation of odds. In comparison with the powers of strategy now demanded, he had so far succeeded by something like rule of thumb.

If, hitherto, his strategy and its success had not necessarily required such powers, neither had they proved that he did not possess them; but there was at least one sign that he would, perhaps, be wanting in the new situation. After achieving the defeat of France he had no considered views as to how he would next proceed. He had begun the War with no finished plan except that for the defeat of Poland; he had fought for nine months with no plan which looked further than the collapse of France. Irresolution and an inability to plan at all might prove his undoing in the more difficult times which lay ahead.

¹ On this see B. H. Liddell Hart, *The Other Side of the Hill*, chap. x.

CHAPTER IV

AN INVASION OF ENGLAND?

I

HITLER'S own thorough plans for the attack on France contained no provision for a subsequent attempt to cross the Channel; nor did he regard the rapid success of the French operation as providing an opportunity for an invasion of England. There is no reference to this project in the minutes of the Naval Conferences until 21 May, a whole month went by before it was next mentioned, on 20 June; and on neither of these occasions is Hitler recorded as having any interest in it. This negative evidence for his early lack of interest is reinforced from other directions. Almost certainly, it was on Raeder's initiative, and not on Hitler's that the subject was raised at all in May and June; the record of these meetings shows that Hitler was thinking on other lines at the time; after 20 June, although, on account of the remaining time available in 1940, a decision had become a pressing need, he remained uncertain for nearly another month. When, at last, on 15 July, he finally decided that the operation should be attempted, two months had gone by since the question was first raised, nearly one month since the defeat of France.

It was on 21 May 1940, at their first meeting since the opening of the Western land offensive, that Raeder and Hitler first discussed, 'in private, details concerning the invasion of England, on which the Naval Staff has been working since November'. Far-sighted and forward in this matter, as he had been over the invasion of Norway, Raeder had ordered his staff to begin to prepare for an invasion of England as early as 15 November 1939. The order had been confined to the Naval Staff, neither Hitler nor the other two Services being informed—a fact which fits in with the view that it

was on Raeder's initiative that the subject was now raised in conference for the first time. This assumption is also borne out by the testimony of German naval officers, at the end of the War, to the effect that Hitler showed no interest in the operation at this early stage. There is, however, no record of what was said on 21 May; nor is there any evidence concerning Hitler's attitude on 20 June, when the subject was next broached. On this second occasion it is clear that it was Raeder who took the initiative. He was particularly anxious to make two points: that the Navy alone should be responsible for building any special landing-craft that might be required, and that air supremacy would be essential in advance.

If it was Raeder and not Hitler who raised the question at these early meetings, the subjects in which Hitler was interested at that time are instructive. They show that he was still content, in the war against Great Britain, with measures short of direct attack. On 21 May, in direct response to a question from Raeder, he decided that it would 'be better to assume that the war will last some time and therefore to organise a long-term programme for U-boat training and construction'; he also announced that he would concentrate on the U-boat and aircraft programmes as soon as the main operations in France were over. On 4 June he explained that his policy was to reduce the Army when France was defeated, releasing older men and skilled workmen for these other programmes. Some time before 20 June, as one measure for increasing the blockade of Great Britain, he asked the Naval Staff to investigate the possibility of occupying Iceland—a project which got so far as to receive the code-name 'Ikarus' but which Raeder, on 20 June, flatly announced to be impossible.

The next fortnight provided further confirmation of Hitler's reluctance to accept the idea of an invasion of England. On 2 July, it is true, a first directive concerning the invasion, signed by Keitel, announced that 'the Führer has decided that a landing in England is possible, provided air superiority can be attained . . .', and that preparations were to begin at once for a landing by 25 to

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40 divisions, if possible on a broad front. But the date of the operation was left undecided; and, what is more, preparations were to go forward on the understanding that it was 'still only a plan and has not yet been decided on'. It was one thing to conclude that an invasion was possible in certain circumstances; it was another thing to decide that it should take place. On this second question Hitler was still uncommitted.

His doubts were now ably reinforced by Raeder. The directive of 2 July bore all the marks of Army influence. In specifying so large a number of divisions, in hoping for a broad front, it contemplated an operation which the Naval Staff regarded as totally impracticable. On 9 July the other two Services were informed that the scope of the undertaking was essentially a matter of the amount of transport available, and that the Naval Staff considered the Dover Straits—a narrow front—as the only area where adequate protection could be guaranteed for the landings. At his next meeting with Hitler, on 11 July, Raeder developed these arguments and began the campaign which he never ceased to conduct, thereafter, against the whole conception of a landing in England. The invasion should be regarded as 'only a last resort to force Britain to her knees'. It would not be necessary, since Great Britain 'can be made to ask for peace simply by cutting off her imports . . .'. He could not 'advocate an invasion of Britain, as he did in the case of Norway. Prerequisites are complete air superiority and the creation of a mine-free area It is impossible to tell how long it would take to clear such an area Deep inroads would be made into German economic and armaments programmes'

Considering that the Naval Staff had been studying the project since November 1939, that it was, apparently, he who first brought it to the attention of Hitler and the other Service chiefs, and that he did so at the first opportunity after the attack on France, Raeder's attitude may seem strange. At the end of the War he claimed that he had ordered the Naval Staff to study the problem, not because he thought an invasion would be necessary, but because he wanted to be prepared should Hitler suddenly order it at short notice. If

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that were so, he did not serve his purpose well by taking the initiative in May and June. Mere professional zeal may explain this, or self-importance and professional jealousy; for to raise the question of an invasion of England was a sure way of bringing the Naval Staff back to the centre of affairs, even if it should soon emerge that the invasion should not be attempted or could not succeed. Alternatively, Raeder may simply have changed his mind as to the practicability of the attempt, in the light of further study, and as a result of the Army's stated requirements in the directive of 2 July.

In any event, on 11 July, Hitler fully agreed with Raeder. In spite of the directive of 2 July, 'the Führer also views invasion as a last resort and also considers air superiority a prerequisite . . .'. He continued to be more interested in other things; in the development of Norway, where Trondhjem was to be made a defended base, 'a beautiful German city is to be built on the fjord', and 'a super-highway is to be built'; in the declaration of the siege of England; in plans for the post-war expansion of the German Fleet and for the future designs of warships; and—the Iceland plan having been abandoned—in acquiring one of the Canary Islands from Spain in exchange for French Morocco. Substantially, his attitude was what it had been before. He had concluded, it is true, that, given air supremacy, an invasion would be possible; but he had not decided whether the attempt should be made. Since 2 July preparations had been in hand; but they were not in hand in earnest or working to any date; and nearly two months had elapsed since the project had first been discussed.

II

Four days later German planning entered its second stage. On 15 July the Naval Staff was informed that Hitler had reached a decision; he would have the operation so prepared that it could be launched at any time after 15 August. On 16 July he issued his own personal directive on the subject.¹ It began by saying that

¹ *N.D.*, 442-PS.

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'as England, in spite of the hopelessness of her military position, has so far shown herself unwilling to come to any compromise, I have therefore decided to begin to prepare for, and if necessary carry out, an invasion of England'. It added that 'this operation is dictated by the necessity of eliminating Great Britain as a base from which the war against Germany can be fought; and, if necessary, the island will be occupied'. The landings must be achieved by 'a surprise crossing'. They were to take place on a broad front extending from Ramsgate to a point west of the Isle of Wight. Preparations were to be completed by mid-August. The British Air Force was to be eliminated in advance. The flanks of the crossing area were to be so heavily mined as to be inaccessible to the enemy's warships. Other preparatory measures were to include the setting up of coastal guns to dominate the crossing area, and heavy air attacks on British naval bases. 'Sea Lion' was to be the code-word for the invasion.

As soon as he received the directive of 16 July, Raeder protested, in a special memorandum, that 'the task allotted to the Navy in operation 'Sea Lion' is out of all proportion to the Navy's strength, and bears no relation to the tasks that are set for the Army and Air Force . . .'. The memorandum went on to list particular difficulties. The embarkation ports had been extensively damaged in the French campaign or else were of limited capacity. The crossing area was one in which the weather, tides and state of the sea might present great problems. At least the first wave of the invasion would have to land on the open coast and this would require special vessels as well as raising navigational problems. There was no way of clearing the area of enemy mines. Air supremacy was vital before the transports could even be collected in the embarkation area. Above all, the landings would meet an enemy who was 'resolved to throw in fully and decisively all his naval forces. It cannot be assumed that the Luftwaffe will succeed in keeping enemy naval forces clear of our shipping Mine-fields will not afford absolutely safe protection in the face of a determined opponent'

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Hitler, if he was not already well aware of these difficulties, was impressed by Raeder's arguments. On 21 July he confessed that the invasion of Great Britain would be

an exceptionally daring undertaking. . . . This is not just another river crossing, but the crossing of a sea which is dominated by the enemy. . . . Operational surprise cannot be expected; a defensively prepared and utterly determined enemy faces us and dominates the sea area which we must use. . . . 40 divisions will be required; the most difficult part will be the continued reinforcement of material and stores. . . . The prerequisites are complete mastery of the air, the operational use of powerful artillery in the Dover Straits and protection by minefields. . . .

The weather and the time of the year were also important factors. 'The main operation would therefore have to be completed by 15 September. . . . If it is not certain that preparations can be completed by the beginning of September, other plans must be considered.

He was already retreating from the position he had taken up in the directive of 16 July. There, he had stated that the landings must take place by surprise; now it was admitted that operational surprise could not be expected. He had formerly asked that preparations should be completed by mid-August; now he accepted the beginning of September as the operative date. The directive had implied that the invasion would be carried out if Great Britain refused to come to terms. But now it was not certain that it could be attempted; other plans might have to be considered.

On one point, however, he was still determined. Whatever the difficulties, he added on 21 July, 'it is necessary to clear up the question whether a direct operation could bring Britain to her knees, and how long this would take. . . .'. Whatever the difficulties, preparations were to proceed. It was still not certain that an invasion could be launched that year; but, if it could be ready in time, if the necessary conditions could be established, it would be launched.

Temporarily, even Raeder accepted this position. On 25 July

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he told Hitler that every effort was being made to complete preparations by the beginning of September; he had dropped his uncompromising opposition to the plan. But he still insisted on all the difficulties. Once again, he described the serious effect the operation would have on German internal economy and stressed the absolute necessity of establishing air superiority in advance. He would not guarantee that enough ships could be collected in time in the embarkation area. He also continued to oppose the Army's demands. By 29 July the Army had reduced its figure of 25-40 divisions for the first wave of the landings to 13. But it still insisted that these should be landed on a broad front from Ramsgate to Lyme Bay; and the Naval Staff continued to regard so broad a front as totally impracticable.

The difficulties to be overcome, which were not reduced by the acrimonious debates which took place between the two Services, loomed larger still on further study, with the result that, on 31 July, Raeder reported that preparations could not be completed on time and urged the postponement of the operation until 1941. He now considered that 15 September was the earliest possible date that could be fixed for the beginning of the invasion; and even that depended on the assumption that no unforeseen circumstances were occasioned by the weather or the enemy. With reference to the Army demands, he objected to two points. The Army wanted the landings to take place in the early dawn, following a night crossing; but a night crossing would be more difficult for the Navy and the early dawn was the most dangerous time at which to land. Enemy naval forces would be able to reach the mouth of the Channel from great distances, without being sighted, in the night hours, and would thus be able to attack dawn landings. If, on the other hand, the crossing were made by day, air reconnaissance would be able to locate the enemy and there would be time to stop the operation if necessary. The other point was that concerning the broad or narrow front. If the Army had its way, no naval or air protection could be given to the landings in the west, near Lyme Bay, though these would be taking place

uncomfortably near the Portsmouth and Plymouth naval bases. With these arguments, Raeder demanded that the crossings should be made by day and the landings limited to the Straits of Dover, as far as Eastbourne.

These demands led to another. If they were accepted, it was clear that the operation would become more difficult from the Army's point of view. 'But the main thing,' declared Raeder, 'is to get the army across in the first place.' The Army and Navy should accept these facts, co-operate in the most careful planning of an operation limited to the Narrows, and undertake lengthier preparations to make sure of its success. The operation should be delayed, on these grounds, till May 1941.

Hitler was not prepared to accept this proposal altogether. He was still determined to test one question finally: could the invasion be prepared for that autumn? Having originally set mid-August as the date for the end of preparations, having later accepted the beginning of September instead, he now decided to accept the further delay which Raeder reported to be unavoidable, rather than abandon outright the project of invading in 1940. His reply to Raeder on 31 July was that

an attempt must be made to prepare the operation for 15 September. . . . The decision as to whether the operation is to take place in September or be delayed until May 1941 will be made after the Air Force has made concentrated attacks on Southern England for one week. The Air Force is to report at once when these attacks will begin. If the effect of the air attacks is such that the enemy air force, harbours and naval forces are heavily damaged, operation 'Sea Lion' will be carried out in 1940. Otherwise it will be postponed till May 1941.

This decision was recapitulated in a directive of 1 August, the Air Force having answered Hitler's query. Preparations were to be completed by 15 September. Eight or fourteen days after the beginning of the air offensive on southern England, scheduled to begin on 5 August, Hitler would decide whether 'Sea Lion' would take place that year or not. If the operation were postponed till 1941, preparations would continue throughout the winter, though not to the extent of damaging German internal economy.

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In this directive Hitler resisted another of Raeder's demands. 'In spite of the Navy's warning', it declared, 'preparations are to be continued for the attack on a broad basis as originally planned.' This resulted in further violent controversy between the Army and the Navy, and eventually led to deadlock between the two Services. On 13 August Raeder asked Hitler for a final decision on this issue, 'as otherwise preparations will be held back'. At the same time, he took the opportunity to emphasise again that 'Sea Lion' should be attempted 'only as a last resort, if Britain cannot be made to sue for peace in any other way'. On the first of these points, Hitler refused to give a decision until he had had a further conference with the Army authorities. On the second, he agreed with Raeder and added that the operation should only be attempted in circumstances in which its success could be relied on. 'Failure on our part would cause the British to gain considerable prestige. We must wait and see what effect our intensive air attacks will have.'

Further conferences between Hitler, the Navy and the Army took place in the next two days. The Naval Staff recognised 'very well the reasons for the demands made by the General Staff. But, just as the General Staff must insist on certain demands which it considers essential for success, the Naval Staff must do likewise with regard to its part in the operation.' The Army plan now required a simultaneous first-wave landing of 10 divisions on a front reaching from Ramsgate to a point west of Brighton, together with another landing, simultaneous if possible, in Lyme Bay. The Naval Staff refused to modify its view that these plans were unacceptable. There was not enough transport, and not enough facilities in the embarkation area, for a first-wave of 10 divisions. The front from Ramsgate to Brighton was far too broad; simultaneous landings near Brighton in the west and between Deal and Ramsgate in the east could not be carried out. A further landing in Lyme Bay was even more impracticable; there was no shipping space for it and, even if there were shipping-space, there would still be no protection. Faced with the facts, Hitler and the Army

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were forced to accept a compromise. Hitler decided on 15 August that the Lyme Bay landing should be abandoned, and that dispositions should be made in such a way as not to exclude the possibility of an attack on a narrow front should this be ordered at the last minute. But he also insisted that, for the moment, a landing was to be planned for the Brighton area as well as in the Narrows.

Controversy over the Brighton landing continued for another 12 days. The Naval Staff wanted to regard it, if it was accepted at all, as merely a diversionary raid; the Army was equally determined to make Brighton one of the principal landing areas. In the end, the Army had its way; but a final decision was not taken till 27 August. On that day it was concluded that landings should take place in three areas between Folkestone and Beachy Head, and also in a fourth area, with 4 divisions, between Brighton and Selsey Bill.

Despite these planning difficulties, throughout the whole of August, Hitler never wavered from the position he had adopted in the middle of July. Though by the end of July the difficulties had forced him to accept two postponements, from mid-August to the beginning of September, and from the beginning to the middle of September, he insisted that all preparations should continue, and he adhered to the intention to invade in September if what he regarded as the necessary conditions could be achieved.

Air superiority had always been regarded as the chief of these conditions; at the end of August it seemed that this would be obtained. For the German Air Force reported that the air situation was at last becoming favourable, in spite of the effect of bad weather on their operations, and hoped for decisive results in the next fortnight. Accordingly, beginning on 1 September, the invasion plan was set in motion. The movement of German shipping from North Sea ports to the embarkation area began on that day. Operational schedules were issued on 3 September: 20 September—another delay—was fixed as the earliest day for the sailing of the invasion; 21 September for the landings; 11 September for

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the issuing of operational orders; D-3, at midday, for the final commands. The entire operation remained liable to cancellation, for the issue still hung on the air battle which had already raged for six weeks. But, so far as advance decisions could be taken, the invasion of England was about to be launched.

III

Less than two months now remained before an invasion in 1940 would be ruled out altogether by weather and sea conditions; less than one month before the end of the period in which, on these grounds, it would be advisable to make the attempt. If ever they could have been surmounted, this was too short a time for surmounting the problems which still remained. These were of two kinds: those to be expected with the launching of any vast operation over the sea, and those created by British counter-measures or arising from the real strength of the British position.

Great numbers of ships had to be moved to the embarkation area; and bad weather added to the difficulties. By 6 September the movement of barges was already behind schedule; minesweeping had not yet been possible on account of bad weather and interference by British aircraft. On 10 September it was still the case that the weather, 'which for the time of the year is completely abnormal and unstable, greatly impairs transport movements and mine-sweeping'.

Weather and logistical problems were not the only, were not the chief, factors in the situation. The R.A.F. denied the enemy that degree of superiority in the air which was essential if the invasion, far from being launched, was ever to be adequately prepared.

It is of decisive importance [wrote the Naval Staff on 10 September] for the judgment of the situation, that no claim be made to the destruction of the enemy Air Force over Southern England and in the Channel The Luftwaffe have achieved a perceptible weakening of the enemy fighter defences. . . . British bombers, however, and the minelaying

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forces of the R.A.F. are still at full operational strength. . . . The activities of the British forces have undoubtedly been successful, even if no decisive hindrance has yet been caused to German transport movements. . . . The operational state which the Naval Staff gave as the most important prerequisite for the operation has not yet been achieved: clear air superiority in the Channel and the extinction of all possibilities of enemy air action in the assembly areas.

The earliest D-day, 21 September, could still, provisionally, be guaranteed; but it was 'endangered by further difficulties and stoppages resulting from weather conditions and enemy action'.

In this still unsettled battle for the air, begun so long ago as the middle of July, a further problem now arose. Until the middle of August the aim of the German Air Force had been to attack British shipping, South Coast ports and airfields in the South of England, within the framework of the 'Sea Lion' plan. In the second half of August, partly from disappointment at the lack of decisive results, partly because it was imperative to force an early decision, partly as a result of disunity and rivalry between the German Armed Services, the plan had been changed. Goering set about forcing the battle over London in the hope that the continuous bombing of the capital would itself induce the British Government to ask for terms. By 10 September, when this new plan was failing like the first, the effect of changing horses had become pronounced. 'It would', continued the naval memorandum of that date, 'be more in the sense of the planned preparation for "Sea Lion" if the Luftwaffe would now concentrate less on London and more on Portsmouth and Dover, and on naval forces in and near the operational area.' Two days later the Navy was more explicit. 'The air war', declared another memorandum of 12 September,¹ 'is being conducted as an "absolute air war" . . . outside the framework of operation "Sea Lion" In particular, one cannot discern any effort by the Luftwaffe to engage the units of the British Fleet, which are now able to operate almost unmolested in the Channel Thus, up to now, the intensified air war has not

¹ This document will be found in W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. II ('Their Finest Hour'), pp. 289-90.

contributed towards the landing operation; hence, for operational reasons, the execution of the landing cannot yet be considered.'

But Hitler had shared Goering's hopes and approved his switching of objectives, and the Naval Staff itself was torn between these hopes and its duty to the planning side of 'Sea Lion'. Accordingly—so it concluded its memorandum of 10 September—it did not 'think it suitable to approach the Luftwaffe or the Führer with such demands (for a change in the air plan), because the Führer looks upon a large-scale attack on London as possibly being decisive, and because a systematic bombardment of London might produce an attitude in the enemy which will make "Sea Lion" unnecessary'. On 14 September Raeder personally subscribed to these views. It was one of his chief points that 'air attacks on England, and particularly on London . . . should be intensified without regard to "Sea Lion". The attacks may have a decisive outcome.'

The issuing of final operational orders for 'Sea Lion' was then already three days overdue; some statement to the Commands was imperative and could not wait for the outcome of the air battle. It was clear, moreover, that, in view of the air situation, another short postponement, if not the cancellation of the plan, was inevitable. Hitler had already wavered between these two alternatives; on 14 September he made up his mind. He recognised that the invasion was still not yet practicable, that some postponement had to be accepted; but he resisted the temptation to cancel the operation altogether. 'It would be wrong, after all, to call off "Sea Lion".' He still hoped that 'if the pressure of the imminent landing were added to further air attacks, the total effect would be very strong after all. Not one attack is decisive but the *total* effect produced.' There was, besides, the fact that, if the invasion were cancelled, British morale would be raised and German air attacks easier to bear.

Raeder agreed with these arguments; but he was more disposed than Hitler to cancellation. ' "Sea Lion" must not be abandoned now, for the reasons given by the Führer'; but the next best thing

was to postpone it for as long as possible. He therefore urged that favourable dates in October should be adopted, either 8 October or 24 October. Hitler would not retreat so far or so fast. He fixed 27 September as the new D-day; he chose to wait until 17 September before deciding whether or not the invasion should take place on this new date.

Bomber Command had by now increased its attacks in the embarkation areas; ships of the Royal Navy had intensified their bombardment of the invasion ports. Eighty invasion barges had been sunk at Ostend on 13 September; further heavy losses, particularly at Antwerp, were inflicted on 15 September. In the battle over London the greatest concentrated effort yet made by the German Air Force was defeated on 15 September, that day which was, in Mr Churchill's words, 'the crux of the Battle of Britain'.¹ Goering had failed over London; Great Britain still fought back; a direct invasion would be necessary after all.

But was invasion possible? Where was the supremacy in the air? Had not the recent heavy destruction of transports, by British ships and aircraft, shown that supremacy to be as indispensable and yet as elusive as ever? On 17 September Hitler decided, not to cancel 'Sea Lion', but to postpone it again. On 19 September the deployment of the transports and barges within the embarkation area, in so far as it was not yet finished, was held up; ships already in the area were instructed to thin out, to reduce the heavy losses that were being inflicted by British raids.² But the whole operation remained at 8 to 10 days readiness until 12 October. On that day a directive announced that Hitler had decided that preparations for 'Sea Lion' should continue throughout the winter, but solely for the purpose of maintaining military and political pressure on Great Britain. 'The British must continue to believe that we are preparing to attack on a broad front. At the

¹ W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. II ('Their Finest Hour'), pp. 293 and 297.

² By 21 September, 214 (12.6 per cent) of the 1697 available barges and 21 (12.5 per cent) of the transports had been destroyed or damaged, according to German figures.

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same time, our war economy must be relieved of some of the heavy strain imposed by invasion preparations.' Should the operation be reconsidered in the spring or early summer of 1941, further orders would be issued.

IV

Now that the main stages of the 'Sea Lion' plan have been outlined, some attempt must be made to define Hitler's developing attitude to the undertaking; and two things, in particular, demand explanation. These are, first, his early reluctance to adopt the plan at all and, secondly, the precise nature of his conception of the plan when he did accept it.

It seems obvious that his original reluctance to accept the invasion project was partly due to the suspicion that the operation would prove, if not impossible, then very difficult at the very least; and, incidentally, it is likely that the difficulties would have seemed no less great, and that his view of them would have been no different, if the German Fleet had sustained no losses in the Norwegian campaign and if many of its smaller ships had not been tied up in Norway. It took him until 2 July to decide that 'a landing in England is possible, provided air superiority can be obtained . . .'; his sense of the difficulties involved survived the decision of 15-16 July, and was in no way diminished by it. A week later, on 21 July, he was still well aware that the invasion would be 'an exceptionally daring undertaking', and 'not just another river-crossing'. Yet by 16 July he had so far overcome his dislike of the project, without losing his earlier respect for the difficulties, as to issue his directive; and this suggests that his sense of the difficulties was not the only reason for his early hesitation. There must have been some other cause for this; and some other factor clearly forced or induced him to conquer his dislike for the undertaking.

The second reason for his reluctance to order the invasion was, there can be no question, the hope that Great Britain would sue

for peace when France was defeated, and that an invasion would be unnecessary. If there were no other evidence for this, the opening words of the directive of 16 July would be enough to show that it was only when this hope had almost died that he brought himself to accept the invasion project. 'As England,' read the directive, 'in spite of the hopelessness of her military position, has so far shown herself unwilling to come to any compromise, I have therefore decided to prepare for, and if necessary carry out, the invasion of England . . .'

But there is other evidence to add to this; for just as the difficulties of the project and his dislike of them survived the directive of 16 July, so did his desire for a settlement with Great Britain. The directive had said that the invasion would take place if necessary, if Great Britain still refused to compromise at the eleventh hour; and for a few more days he clung to the declining hope that she would. On 19 July he delivered, at last, a direct appeal; he had previously hoped that Great Britain would need no prompting. 'In this hour', he declared, in a speech to the Reichstag, 'I feel it to be my duty before my own conscience to appeal once more to reason and common sense in Great Britain . . . I can see no reason why this war need go on . . .' The speech was followed by diplomatic approaches to this country through Sweden, the United States and the Vatican.¹ There is no doubt that Hitler was anxious for the result and serious in the attempt. 'A speedy termination of the War', he told Raeder on 21 July, 'is in the interests of the German people.'

Some details have already been given of the stages through which this hope had grown, and others may now be added. Before the War he had been under no illusions. On 23 May 1939, although he thought it might be possible to secure the 'immediate capitulation' of Great Britain by destroying her fleet, although he contemplated some such 'final decisive blow', he recognised that 'it would be criminal for a government to rely entirely on the element of

¹ See Maxime Mourin, *Les Tentatives de Paix, 1939-45*, pp. 86-8, and W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. II ('Their Finest Hour'), pp. 229-32.

surprise'; he insisted that 'preparations must be made for a long war'; he assured his audience that 'conflict with Great Britain would be a life and death struggle'. 'The idea that we can get off cheaply', he continued, 'is dangerous; there is no such possibility.... The government must be prepared for a war of 10-15 years duration.'¹ But the conclusion of the Russian Pact, as already noted, changed these views: there was no insistence on the difficulty or the length of the war in the speech of 22 August 1939,² but only in his belief that the war would be a short one. The Pact encouraged the hope that France and Great Britain would accept a *fait accompli* after the defeat of Poland; his strategy for the Polish campaign was based on that hope; and if it was soon abandoned, it was at once replaced by the conviction that Great Britain would give way when France was defeated. This is quite clearly revealed in the memorandum of 9 October³ and in the speech of 23 November 1939,⁴ in which he declared that the attack on France 'means the end of the World War, not just a single action'; and there is the other, if less direct, evidence in some of his remarks to Goering, Ribbentrop and Raeder.

Occasionally, as on 22 November 1939, instead of saying that he would concentrate on the war against Great Britain after France was defeated, he would say to Raeder that it must then be decided 'whether⁵ the naval war is then to be intensified'. On 26 January 1940, having previously expressed the hope that Italy might join Germany after the defeat of France, he felt that, 'as Italy will only enter the war in the event of great German successes, there are no great advantages for Germany in Italy's participation...'. A remark of Goering's,⁶ at a conference on 30 January 1940, provides further confirmation that Hitler still expected a decisive victory in the West after he had been forced to postpone the attack and to add the invasion of Norway to his plans. 'The Führer,' said Goering on that occasion, 'is firmly convinced that he will succeed in

¹ *N.D.*, 79-L.

² *N.D.*, 52-I.

³ *My italics.*

⁴ *N.D.*, 798-PS and 104-PS.

⁵ *N.D.*, 789-PS.

⁶ *N.D.*, 605-EC.

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reaching a decision of the war in the year 1940 . . . and has therefore decided to make use of our reserves of raw material without regard to future times. . .'. A statement in Jodl's diary for 20 May 1940¹ is also revealing in this connection. 'The Führer', he wrote, 'is beside himself with joy. . . . The British can get a separate peace any time, after restitution of the colonies. A special memorandum containing the emotion-choked words of the Führer when receiving the report about the capture of Abbeville is in the files.' A statement by Ribbentrop carries on the same tale. He claimed² that just after the evacuation of Dunkirk he 'wondered whether we could not make a quick peace'. 'The Führer', he continued, 'was enthused with the idea himself', and described the basis of an offer he would make to Great Britain. 'It will only be a few points, and the first point is that nothing must be done between England and Germany which would in any way violate the prestige of Great Britain. Secondly, Great Britain must give us back one or two of our old colonies. That is the only thing we want. . . .'

It must be admitted that Hitler had made occasional remarks to Raeder which are not consistent with this argument. As late as 21 May 1940 he told Raeder that 'it would be better to assume that the war will last for some time and therefore to organise a long-term programme for U-boat training and construction'; as late as 4 June it was still his professed intention to reduce the Army as soon as France was defeated, and concentrate on the Navy and Air Force programme for the war against Great Britain. But he was not always honest with Raeder, while, on these subjects in particular, he was always anxious to reassure him. The subsequent evidence, moreover, is so strong, consisting, as it does, of his last-minute appeal to Great Britain and of diplomatic approaches, that it cannot be doubted that what he hoped for, and what he had expected, was the surrender of Great Britain after the defeat of France.

¹ *N.D.*, 1809-PS.

² *N.D. (C. and A.)*, Supplement B, p. 1179; *Proceedings*, Part 10, p. 194.

If he refused to consider the invasion project until 2 July, if he was apparently satisfied with measures short of a direct assault, if—even after 2 July—he hesitated to order the invasion until 15-16 July, it was not because he was content, as Raeder was, to defeat Great Britain ‘simply by cutting off her imports’. It was because he hoped that Great Britain would ask for terms and relieve him of the necessity of launching an operation which, in any case, he disliked. It was not because he was prepared to accept a long war with this country; it was because he was determined on a short one.

But if his hope of a quick settlement with Great Britain was the main reason for his reluctance to adopt the invasion plan in the first place, it was also the one thing which made him conquer his dislike of the undertaking in the end. As the British determination to fight on—announced, as it was encouraged, by Mr Churchill—became more obvious, as he contemplated the difficulties of invasion, Hitler’s desire for a quick settlement grew while his hopes of it declined. In this process he was led, first, on 16 July, to declare that ‘Sea Lion’ would be attempted if Great Britain did not give way, then, on 19 July, to make his final peace offer, and finally, when this offer was at once rejected by the British Government and Press, its rejection being officially confirmed on 22 July by the British Foreign Secretary, to accept the fact that direct invasion had become the one remaining way of avoiding a long war in the West. It was only then that he conquered his dislike of the invasion project and his undiminished sense of the difficulties involved.

His dislike, however, was never fully overcome and, perhaps as a direct result of that fact, his hope of a British collapse was not entirely abandoned; and it is these two things which explain his attitude to ‘Sea Lion’ once he had adopted it. The directive of 16 July had contained more than one qualification. It had declared that ‘Sea Lion’ would be attempted if Great Britain refused to come to terms: ‘I have therefore decided to begin to prepare for and, if necessary, carry out an invasion of England’. But it had also announced that ‘if necessary, the island will be occupied’; and

behind this second qualification was the view that, though Great Britain was refusing to compromise before an invasion was attempted, she was, nevertheless, so near to collapse that the mere threat of a serious attempt on her shores would provide the *coup de grace*. In a memorandum of 30 June 1940¹ Jodl had argued that a direct assault on Great Britain should only be considered if it could be calculated with confidence that it would have this effect, and there can be no doubt that it was on this calculation, though without the confidence, that Hitler finally adopted the 'Sea Lion' plan. In his directive, it is true, he threatened to go to greater lengths, but in his mind 'Sea Lion' was never more than a colossal bluff. Anything less, whatever his lack of confidence, was ruled out by his anxiety to end the war with Great Britain. Anything more was impossible; and he, who never forgot the difficulties, knew that that was so.

This is the explanation of his handling of the operation, and particularly of the air force side of it: he was always seeking those circumstances in which, by a nominal invasion, the *coup de grace* could be delivered. It is also the explanation of what he meant when he described the 'Sea Lion' plan, as he frequently did, as 'only a last resort'. Both he and Raeder used this expression to describe their attitude to 'Sea Lion'; and it is not difficult to see that they used it in a different sense. Raeder meant by it, as he said on 11 July, that, 'as Great Britain can be made to sue for peace simply by cutting off her imports', direct invasion would never be necessary: his 'last resort' was one which would never arise. What Hitler meant by it was, for a week or two after the directive of 16 July, that, as Great Britain might still give way, even the attempt at invasion might prove to be unnecessary, and, when events had gone beyond that stage, that the attempt would only be made if Great Britain could be seen to be defeated.

It was because this was his attitude to the invasion plan that, from the beginning of this second stage until the eventual postponement of 'Sea Lion' on 12 October, Hitler's behaviour was a

¹ N.D., 1776-PS.

curious mixture of obstinacy and irresolution. On the one hand, after the rejection of his peace offer, it seemed essential to test the British determination to resist, to see whether the threat of invasion could induce Great Britain to give way, to discover whether she could be so reduced by further operations that the *coup de grace* could be delivered, to have the invasion so prepared that it could be attempted if these favourable conditions arose. This is what he meant on 21 July, when he declared that 'we must clear up the question whether a direct operation would bring Great Britain to her knees, and how long this would take'. So great was his desire for a short war, so clear his realisation that 'Sea Lion' would prove even more difficult in 1941, and even less effective at alarming Great Britain into surrender, that he clung to the plan for invasion in 1940 through every unavoidable delay. And this series of delays is a testimony, not to his irresolution—for the delays were unavoidable—but to his obstinacy, to the strength of his wish to bring the war with Great Britain to a speedy end.

On the other hand, he was never confident that 'Sea Lion', even if launched in what were his conditions for 'the last resort', would have the success he hoped for; and he was convinced that it could not be launched if those conditions were not obtained. His heart was not in the plan. On 21 July he admitted that, 'if it is not certain that preparations can be completed by the beginning of September, other plans must be considered'; on 31 July that, if the Air Force was not totally successful in two weeks in crushing British resistance, the operation would have to be postponed till 1941. On 13 August he agreed with Raeder that 'Sea Lion' should only be attempted if it was certain to succeed; and when the operational schedules were issued on 3 September, the air battle had still not been settled and the operation still remained liable to cancellation. By that time he had subscribed to Goering's hope that the bombing of London might itself force the British Government to ask for terms. And by then at the latest, if not since the middle of August, his main reason for keeping 'Sea Lion' in readiness was not the intention of launching it; it was the belief

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that, 'if the pressure of imminent landing were added to further air attacks, the total effect would be very strong after all'. Great Britain, it was still his hope, might yet give way.

In this way, the survival of the hope that the British would come to terms contributed to his obstinacy in clinging to the plan in spite of all the difficulties. But his obstinacy was of no avail, and it only served to increase his subsequent difficulties. For if it cannot be argued that he was wrong to adopt the plan and to insist for so long on its retention, if he was right to put it to every test before abandoning it, he was wrong to concentrate upon it, as he did, to the complete exclusion of all other planning. With the postponement of 'Sea Lion', frustrated in his frontal attack on the British position, more anxious than ever for a quick victory, he was forced to consider new courses, the need for which he had not anticipated, the planning of which was non-existent or ill-prepared.

CHAPTER V

THE CRUCIAL MONTHS, SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 1940

I

IT was now that Hitler began to pay for his earlier mistakes. He had entered the war with too few U-boats, with too small a fleet. He had begun it with no military plans except that for the invasion of Poland; he had fought it for ten months without developing any that looked further than the defeat of France. His deficiency in this respect had been hidden by his successes in the Polish, Norwegian and French campaigns, and by the successive hopes that those campaigns encouraged—by the hope that France and Great Britain would stop short of war, then that they would accept a *fait accompli* when Poland was overrun, and then that Great Britain would make a settlement when France was defeated. None of these hopes had materialised; and when the last had faded, and when 'Sea Lion' was frustrated in its turn, it became only too obvious that the new situation was not one in which much hope of an early victory could be retained. He was still anxious, he was more anxious than ever, for an early settlement with Great Britain. But mixed with this anxiety, making it worse, there was now the fear that he would be unable either to inflict an early defeat on this country or to bring enough pressure to bear to induce her to accept his terms within a measurable time.

In these circumstances, if it was out of the question—and not in accord with Hitler's temperament—to do nothing, one obvious policy would have been to abandon the aim of an early end to the war and to concentrate on the Battle of the Atlantic, and on U-boat construction in particular. There was an undeniable logic in Raeder's

claim that Great Britain could be defeated 'simply by cutting off her imports': a complete siege of these islands would quickly destroy their ability to resist.

The U-boat campaign, neglected—even if for good reasons—until the defeat of France, had continued to be neglected, as a result of the decision to attempt the invasion of England, from July to the middle of September. It is true that, on 31 July 1940, fulfilling the many promises he had made to this effect before the fall of France, Hitler had at last approved an increase in U-boat building. But he had also decided that 'Sea Lion' must be attempted, in spite of his dislike for it, because he felt that nothing less would do; and as the preparations for 'Sea Lion' got into their stride his concession was seen to be of little value; the uselessness of nominal priorities became apparent. On 15 August Raeder had to complain that the manpower promised for increased U-boat construction had not been provided, 'in spite of all the efforts of the Ministry of Labour'. He was forced to demand that the new U-boat programme be given 'priority over other top priority items'. But his arguments were in vain.

Hitler 'recognised these demands'; he gave the necessary orders; but these had little effect as long as 'Sea Lion' remained in preparation; and when 'Sea Lion' was postponed it emerged that Hitler's profession of sympathy amounted to very little and that other forces in Germany were even less co-operative. On 26 September Raeder learned from Hitler that Goering was claiming that 'he could substitute aircraft for U-boats' to the advantage of the war against British trade. While Hitler was again sympathetic to Raeder's case, recognising that 'the Air Force is dependent on the weather . . . , that enemy shipping is best reduced by U-boats, that harbours can be destroyed by the Air Force, that . . . it is the combined effort which is decisive', he failed to settle inter-service differences or to solve the problem of competing demands. On 14 November, two months after 'Sea Lion' had been put off, U-boat construction was still behind schedule. It had been handicapped, in Raeder's view, 'by the fact that too many projects have been awarded special priority'.

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It was not because of any lack of success that the U-boat campaign thus failed, even after the postponement of 'Sea Lion', to get adequate backing from Hitler. In spite of the successive obstructions and delays which faced the new-construction programme, Raeder had been able to report remarkable U-boat successes in the first fourteen months of the War, and especially after the fall of France, with the few operational U-boats available. The U-boats, he constantly reported, 'prove very remunerative. . . . The results are considerable. . . . The enemy continually stresses the fact that he considers the ruthless U-boat campaign the greatest danger to Great Britain. . . .' These claims were in no way exaggerated; the U-boats were the British Government's greatest concern. British losses were alarming: 164 merchant ships were sunk by U-boat alone in the first six months of the War; 211 in the four months from June to September 1940; another 63 in October 1940. By the end of the first fourteen months the U-boats had destroyed no less than 471 British, Allied and neutral ships, of more than two million tons. These figures represented a magnificent achievement at a time when there were never more than seven or eight U-boats at sea. That they were so high was due to the weakness of British defences. In due course those defences were to improve: each of the far more numerous U-boats at the height of the Battle of the Atlantic in 1942 sank ten times less tonnage than did each of the few available at the outbreak of war, or built in time to operate before the spring of 1941. But the British defences, even in 1941, improved but slowly; there would have been time to do most serious, if not decisive, damage to British shipping if Hitler had concentrated on the Battle of the Atlantic when 'Sea Lion' was abandoned.

It is not difficult to see why he would not choose this course. Partly because they take so long to build, and particularly to work up, partly because of the small number with which Germany entered the War, partly because of his neglect of U-boats construction in the first year, there were not enough U-boats available, and their number could not be sufficiently rapidly increased, to

have that early and decisive effect on the War which Hitler still wanted; which indeed, frustrated in the attempt to land in England, he was more than ever anxious to achieve. Even in this period of Great Britain's greatest weakness and Germany's greatest opportunity at sea, the maximum concentration on the U-boat campaign would not have been able to stop the flow of British imports within a short time; at best, the issue would have been long drawn-out and a decision would not have come until late in 1941. Hitler's successes on land had failed to bring Britain 'to her senses'. His threat of invasion had also failed to secure this result. He had been unable to translate that threat into action. And now the U-boat campaign appeared to him to be an inadequate substitute if Great Britain was to be defeated or forced to compromise in anything like the time he wanted. If that was to be accomplished, he felt that he must look elsewhere. After September 1940 the U-boat campaign was neglected, as it had been in the first year of the War, because Hitler was still bent on a quick victory—or an early settlement—in the West.

II

Another consideration which led him to adopt this attitude was his interest in an attack on Russia. Since he had long intended such a step when the opportunity arose, the hope that Great Britain would collapse when France was defeated had temporarily encouraged the belief that he could turn on Russia in the near future. When Great Britain refused to give way, and it seemed that 'Sea Lion' would have to be launched, his interest in Russia had remained alive on precautionary grounds. And when 'Sea Lion', like the earlier hope of a British surrender, was also abandoned, the possibility of an Eastern campaign, brought into the foreground by these earlier circumstances, remained in his mind for other reasons.

While appreciating its tactical advantages, Hitler had never liked the Russian Pact; nor, in its first year of operation, had he

liked Russia's calculated exploitation of its terms. Until the summer of 1940, when he gained his favourable decision in the West, he had regarded it as a compelling military necessity to avoid anything which might give Russia grounds for mistrust; and Russia had profited from this. In October 1939 the Baltic States were forced to hand over bases to Russia, with German agreement, and Germany was forced to limit the sea war in the Baltic to West of 20°E, anything east of that line being regarded by Russia as intrusion in her zone of influence. On 30 November 1939 there followed the Russian attack on Finland, which Hitler disliked. In February 1940, in the first Russo-German economic treaty, Russia's demands were high. In June 1940 Russia annexed the Baltic States, omitting to inform Germany in advance, just as Germany had omitted to inform her in advance of the invasion of Norway and France. This annexation was distasteful to Hitler. It was made worse by being extended to include Southern Lithuania, which the Pact had stated to be in the German sphere of influence; but a month later, after much hesitation, Germany surrendered her claims here in return for some money. In June 1940 Russia demanded Bukovina, a second area not recognised by the Pact as being in the Russian sphere of interest; but Germany was again forced to submit, to put diplomatic pressure on Roumania, and to induce her to give way to Russia's demand. All these territorial changes in Russia's favour had a considerable influence on Hitler's later attitude to Russia, especially as, in the Pact, it had been understood that, even in the areas recognised as being in the Soviet sphere of influence, there would be no occupation by Russia.¹

Even at his meetings with Raeder in this period, although—being a land and not a naval question—Russia was only the subject of incidental discussion, his growing dislike and distrust had often been revealed. On 10 October 1939 he rejected 'for political reasons' Raeder's suggestion that Russia should be asked to supply

¹ For these and further details see *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941*, and also *N.D.*, 170-C.

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Germany with U-boats. On 22 November 1939, when Raeder returned to this suggestion, Hitler again rejected it on the grounds that 'the Russians, who in any case should not be allowed to see any of our weaknesses, would never consent to give us U-boats'. On 26 January 1940 he ordered the Naval Staff to delay as long as possible the promised transfer to Russia of ships and ship-construction plans, because he hoped 'to avoid this altogether if the War develops favourably'. On 9 March Raeder proposed that, when Norway was invaded, the Russians should be informed that Germany did not intend to occupy Tromsø, and be allowed to occupy it themselves, 'as constituting some consideration for their interests'; but Hitler insisted on the German occupation of the Tromsø area because 'he did not wish to have the Russians so near'.

But Russia's behaviour was not the only reason for Hitler's distrust. That distrust had been present from the beginning, and to understand Hitler's attitude at this time it is also necessary to recall that, in Mr Churchill's words, 'the two great totalitarian empires, equally devoid of moral restraints, confronted each other, polite but inexorable'—and to add to that situation the fact that Hitler had long intended to turn on Russia when the West was defeated. That this was his plan was implied in his pre-war speeches to his Commanders-in-Chief; and it was made particularly clear in his memorandum of 9 October and his speech of 23 November 1939.¹ At that time he looked forward with confidence to the submission of Great Britain on the heels of the French defeat; and, so far as Russia was concerned, though he must be on his guard, he could feel confident that she would adhere to the Pact and that he himself would be free to turn on her before too long, in his own time, while she was still weak, with the Western Powers defeated or placated. This had been one of his arguments for attacking France without delay.

Subsequent evidence shows that, from that time on, he became increasingly anxious to put his Russian plan into effect as soon as

¹ See above pp. 39 and 45.

possible. If there can be no doubt that this was one reason why he hoped that Great Britain would accept a settlement when France was defeated, it is equally clear that, conversely, the very strength of this hope, up to the middle of July 1940, must have contributed to his state of mind by seeming to bring an unfettered attack on Russia so much nearer as a practical possibility. The German Naval Staff, at any rate, in spite of Hitler's assurances that he would concentrate on the Navy and Air Force when France was defeated, feared this development, noting in their files on 4 June 1940¹ that 'there is no talk about Russia as yet'; so, according to the German Navy's information, did the Russians.² And both feared it with good reason. Before the fall of France, Hitler had confided to Jodl that he would take steps against Russia 'the moment our military position makes it at all possible';³ some time before the middle of July, while still confident that Great Britain would accept a settlement, he told Keitel that he wanted to launch the Eastern campaign in the autumn of 1940.⁴

When it emerged that Great Britain would not accept a settlement, Hitler decided to give operation 'Sea Lion' priority over any further consideration of an offensive in the East; but his interest in an attack on Russia continued for two reasons. In the first place, although the spring of 1941 was now accepted as the earliest possible date for the attack, he still intended to attack Russia as soon as Great Britain was defeated; and this fact and the new date were announced by Jodl on 29 July 1940.⁵ In the second place, if he was waiting for his chance to turn on Russia, he could not avoid the thought that his decision to attempt 'Sea Lion' might be Russia's chance to turn on him.

¹ *N.D.*, 170-C, item 54.

² *N.D.*, 170-C, items 55 and 56.

³ *N.D.*, 172-L, a lecture given by Jodl in November 1943.

⁴ Affidavit of General Warlimont in 1945, *N.D.*, 3032-PS. According to Warlimont, Hitler made this remark some time before 29 July 1940. It is a fair assumption that he made it before 15-16 July, on which date he finally decided to attempt 'Sea Lion' in the autumn.

⁵ According to Warlimont; see *N.D.*, 3032-PS and his further testimony in *N.D. (C. and A.)*, Supplement B, pp. 1635-7.

On 21 July, having concluded that 'Sea Lion' must be launched, although he was still convinced that Russia 'will make no effort to enter into the war against Germany on her own accord', he suspected that Great Britain would hope and try for Russian assistance. He could not help thinking that 'Russia's entry into the war would be unpleasant for Germany, especially on account of the threat from the air. . . . Naturally it is our duty to deliberate the Russian and American questions carefully.' On 13 August he suddenly ordered the fortification of the fiords in North Norway 'so that Russian attacks there would have no chance of success'. On 27 August, when the final moves in 'Sea Lion' were about to be taken, he ordered two armoured and ten other divisions to the East 'in order to guarantee the protection of the Roumanian oil-fields'. On 20 September the Army and the Air Force were ordered to send military missions into Roumania for the same purpose and also in order 'to prepare for the deployment from Roumanian bases of German and Roumanian forces, in case a war with Soviet Russia is forced upon us'.¹ That the main reason for these moves was defensive is further indicated by Jodl's instructions to the German counter-intelligence service on 6 September 1940.² 'The Eastern territory will be manned more strongly in the weeks to come. . . . These regroupings must not create the impression in Russia that we are preparing an offensive in the East. On the other hand, Russia will realise that . . . we can at any time protect our interests—especially in the Balkans—with strong forces against Russian seizure.' German naval files for the same period bear further testimony to the anxiety felt at what they call 'the Stalin-Cripps negotiations' and 'the English attempt to split Russia away from Germany'.³

When Hitler was at last forced to postpone 'Sea Lion' in the middle of September, although this allowed a reduction of his immediate anxiety about a possible Russian attack on Germany, his attitude towards an Eastern offensive underwent a further development. On the one hand, his interest in an early attack on

¹ *N.D.*, 53-C.

² *N.D.*, 1229-PS.

³ *N.D.*, 170-C.

Russia revived: he was, once again, uncommitted. On the other hand, the fact that the war in the West was likely to be prolonged opened up the equally unpleasant, if not equally likely, prospects that the United States and Russia might one day enter the war on Great Britain's side. Accordingly, a first directive for the planning of a possible Eastern campaign, though it did not mention Russia by name, was issued on 9 August 1940, as soon as Hitler suspected that 'Sea Lion' would have to be postponed.¹ The Naval Staff was not informed of this; but Raeder later admitted that some such order must have been issued,² the Naval Staff suspected at the time that it had been issued,³ and Raeder himself, at a meeting with Hitler on 26 September, provided further evidence of the extent to which, so soon after the postponement of 'Sea Lion', Hitler had recovered his interest in an early attack on Russia. On that date, in conversation with Hitler, one of his arguments in favour of a German thrust through Suez and Syria to Turkey was that 'the Russian problem will then appear in a different light . . . it is doubtful whether an attack against Russia in the north would then be necessary.'

The situation had altered, however, since Hitler had previously, in the period up to mid-July, considered an early attack. On that occasion he had assumed that Great Britain would soon accept a settlement, and that he would soon be free to turn on Russia, as he had always intended, in conditions of his own choosing. Now, when 'Sea Lion' had failed, it was obvious that that assumption had been wrong and that war with Great Britain would continue. Thus his interest in a Russian campaign had not merely revived or increased; it had become more complex. It was true that he had become free to act since the postponement of 'Sea Lion'; but it was also true that to act was to accept a war on two fronts.

This was a decision that not even Hitler could take without much hesitation; and, for this reason, the fact that he was interested,

¹ Affidavit of General Warlimont in 1945, *N.D.*, 3031-PS, and *N.D. (C. and A.)*, Supplement B, pp. 1635-7.

² *N.D.*, 66-C.

³ *N.D.*, 170-C, item 86.

once again, in attacking Russia, and had issued a preparatory order, must not be confused with a fixed determination to make the attack in this new situation. He had always been interested in attacking Russia; the preparatory order was known to very few men, even among the top ranks of the Army, and was only concerned with the hypothetical case of an attack.¹ What his final decision would be, in the conditions which now obtained, was far from being a foregone conclusion.

Nor was it an urgent matter that he should make up his mind. For one thing, it was now late autumn and the attack, if he ordered it, could not take place until the following spring. For another, his interest in the attack was no longer based—if it had ever been—on the view that a Russian attack on Germany was imminent. Now that 'Sea Lion' was abandoned, at any rate for the present, his temporary anxiety on this score had passed away. From that time on he never ceased to agree with Raeder that 'Russia is afraid of Germany's strength'.

In the next few months, then, he could wait on events. He could even continue to hope that Great Britain might yet be defeated or would still surrender. For some time to come he would still encourage Russia, as he said on 26 September, 'to advance towards the south, against Persia and India'; 'Sea Lion' was not yet cancelled but only postponed; and the possibility of German attacks on Great Britain in other areas had already claimed his attention.

III

It was to the Mediterranean, and not to Russia, that Hitler, his chief interest being still in quick successes against Great Britain, turned his immediate attention when 'Sea Lion' was postponed. One object behind the attack on France, according to his directive

¹ Warlimont was definite on this point (see *N.D. [C. and A.]*, Supplement B, pp. 1635-7) and Goering adds weight to it by claiming that he was unaware of any such planning until November 1940 (see Supplement B, pp. 1108-9).

of 9 October 1939,¹ had been 'to bring Italy to our aid as a brother-in-arms'; the importance of the Mediterranean for the British position was obvious; if, however reluctantly, he had now to contemplate further campaigns, this was the area which offered the best, if not the only, hope of quick results.

Four months had now elapsed since the Mediterranean was opened up by Italy's entry into the War; four months in which the possibilities in that theatre had been ignored. For some time before the defeat of France he had tended to think that that achievement would itself be enough to end the War, and that Mediterranean operations would not be necessary. On 26 January 1940, going back on the sentiment expressed in his earlier directive of 9 October 1939, he said that, as 'Italy will only enter the War in the event of great German successes . . .', he saw 'no great advantages for Germany in Italy's participation. . .'. On 23 February 1940, when Raeder asked for permission to send U-boats to the Mediterranean, he refused on the grounds that such operations were not 'decisive for the War', though he promised to discuss the question with Mussolini. A month later, on 26 March, he admitted that he had not kept his promise, 'since no detail regarding the conduct of the War was discussed when he met the Duce'. A further pointer—not, perhaps, without significance in this context—is that he remained content with seizing Northern and Atlantic France when France collapsed. Until the middle of July he continued to hope that further campaigns would not be necessary. Thereafter, if it had at last become evident that the War was still not won, the planning of Mediterranean operations was delayed for another two months as a result of the decision to attempt an invasion of England.

It is true that the Mediterranean was discussed during these four months. On 30 June, in a memorandum on the 'continuation of the war against England',² Jodl, considering the possibilities of 'extending the war to the periphery' as an alternative to concentrating all German efforts against the United Kingdom, mentioned

¹ *N.D.*, 62-C.

² *N.D.*, 1776-PS.

that 'the military support of Italy and Spain is possible in a limited way (e.g. for the mining of the Suez Canal or the conquest of Gibraltar)', and considered that 'an Italian operation against Suez in conjunction with the conquest of Gibraltar, thus sealing off the Mediterranean, would be most effective'. Some time later, the Army was discussing, though with little enthusiasm, the despatch of two Panzer divisions to North Africa to assist the Italians in such an offensive; and, when this suggestion was discussed on 31 July, Hitler conceded that he himself was thinking of an attack on Gibraltar. Previously, on 11 July, he had said he would like to acquire one of the Canary Islands, and had ordered the Naval Staff to report on which would be most suitable.

But there is a vast difference between the suggestion or consideration of such steps and the active planning of them, and the first serious discussion of Mediterranean operations did not take place until it began to seem likely that the invasion of England would have to be abandoned; until Raeder, on 6 September 1940, plucked up the courage to ask Hitler about his 'political and military directives if operation "Sea Lion" does not take place'. His own suggestions on that date were to the effect that Gibraltar and Suez had 'a decisive significance for German-Italian warfare in the Mediterranean', that the Mediterranean itself was of 'vital importance to the position of the Central Powers in South-Eastern Europe, Asia Minor, Arabia, Egypt and Africa', and that the aim should be to exclude Great Britain from that area. In addition, the loss of Gibraltar would raise 'crucial difficulties for Great Britain's import traffic in the Atlantic'; and Raeder therefore argued that this operation, in particular, should be undertaken at once, 'before the U.S.A. steps in'. 'It should not be considered of secondary importance, but as one of the main blows against Britain.' Hitler decided on the spot that the necessary planning should begin.

At the same meeting, because of his conviction that the United States would soon enter the War and because of its relevance to a German attempt against Gibraltar, Raeder also outlined the danger

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that existed in the Atlantic approaches to the Mediterranean and in West Africa. At any time, he argued, and especially if Germany moved against Gibraltar, the United States might occupy the Spanish and Portuguese Atlantic islands, British West Africa, French North-West Africa or Dakar; and Great Britain herself would probably occupy the Azores or the Canaries if she lost Gibraltar. No decision was reached immediately as to the steps that might be taken against these formidable dangers; but, while Raeder showed a preference for 'far-sighted German measures', in collaboration with Vichy, to get Dakar and French North-West Africa under German control, Hitler was clearly impressed, above all, by the possibility of seizing the Canaries. He had already shown an interest in them; their importance for a German attack on Gibraltar was obvious; and he now declared that their occupation by the German Air Force was 'both expedient and feasible'.

Hitler's interest in an attack on Gibraltar steadily increased in the next fortnight. Serrano Suñer, visiting Berlin to discuss the subject in the middle of September, encouraged him by reaffirming, on 17 September, an official Spanish assurance of June 1940 that Spain would enter the War on Germany's side when arms and grain supplies enabled her to defy the British blockade. On the same day Hitler told Suñer that 'it would be a matter of taking Gibraltar with extraordinary speed and then of protecting the Straits'; at the same time he wrote a letter to Franco in which he insisted on the importance of the undertaking and asked for a meeting on the Spanish frontier.¹ On 19 September Ribbentrop informed Mussolini² that 'the Führer has carefully examined the Gibraltar problem and come to the conclusion that the conquest of the Rock is absolutely possible, but only if the Spaniards were to be given assistance'. He also revealed that negotiations had already begun with Spain. Mussolini was told that Germany had

¹ For references in this paragraph see *The Spanish Government and the Axis*, a collection of documents published by the U.S. Dept. of State in 1946. Document No. 1 of the collection gives the June promise, document No. 4 the minutes of the meeting of 17 September. Document No. 5 contains the text of Franco's reply to Hitler's letter.

² *N.D.*, 1842-PS.

agreed to provide Spain with special troops and aircraft, that it had already been 'verbally provided that Spain would come into the War as soon as Franco had completed his preparations and particularly after the German special weapons, troops and aircraft had arrived . . .', and that Ribbentrop intended to sign a protocol with Suñer to this effect when he returned to Berlin. On 28 September Hitler himself impressed on Ciano the importance of getting Franco to collaborate in the operation on the ground that 'it was critical for Germany and Italy to end the war in great security and as soon as possible'.¹

By this date, then, though the Spanish attitude was more cautious, and the difficulties to be overcome far greater, as will be seen, than Ribbentrop implied, the attack on Gibraltar had become Hitler's chief interest. But it was not the only plan which received consideration. Apart from his interest in the Canaries, to which we have already referred, there is the fact that equipment for operations in North Africa was given first priority in the German war production programme on 17 September,² while the question of 'beginning preparations in Libya in conjunction with Italy' was due to be examined in the near future at the end of October.³ 'Action against Turkey with the purpose of breaking through to Suez from the east' was also under discussion at this time, as will be seen from a later reference in due course. And Raeder remained anxious about North-West Africa.

When 'Sea Lion' was finally postponed, Raeder could return to these subjects more forcefully and with more precise ideas. On 26 September, arguing that 'the British have always considered the Mediterranean the pivot of their world empire', that Italy was 'surrounded by British power and fast becoming the main target of attack', and that 'Britain always attempts to strangle the weaker', he argued once again that Germany's first objective should be to 'clear up the Mediterranean situation'. For the reason he had previously given, the danger of American intervention, he again

¹ *The Spanish Government and the Axis*, Document No. 6.

² *N.D.*, 2353-PS, pp. 323-4.

³ *N.D.*, 376-PS.

urged that this task should be undertaken at once, and finished in the winter of 1940-1. And he now added his detailed suggestions. These were the capture of Gibraltar, the Canaries being secured in advance by the Air Force; the capture of Suez, for which the Italians would need German help; an advance from Suez, through Palestine and Syria, to Turkey; and collaboration with Vichy France for the protection of North-West Africa and Dakar.

Hitler agreed with this 'general trend of thought'; he undertook to discuss it with Mussolini and, though he had already written to Franco in the previous week, 'possibly with General Franco'. It was, he conceded, important to exclude Great Britain and the United States from North-West Africa; an advance through Syria, if not so essential, would be 'quite feasible'. He pointed out, however, that Raeder's programme bristled with difficulties. For action in North-West Africa it would be necessary to have the collaboration of Vichy France; for action against Gibraltar and the Canaries, the collaboration of General Franco. But it was useless to hope for agreement with both France and Spain, because Franco would want French Morocco in return for any Spanish assistance. It might be possible to make do with the collaboration of one or the other, in which case Hitler felt that he would probably choose France because Spain was inclined to demand too much. In any case, an advance through Syria would depend on the attitude taken by France. French collaboration, however, would not be welcomed by Italy; she would especially object to giving greater freedom to the French Fleet. At the very least, France would have to accept in advance considerable Italian and German demands concerning the French colonies; and this would be difficult to arrange.

Notwithstanding these doubts, discussion of these various projects continued, Hitler himself forcing the pace with special reference to the idea in which he had already shown the greatest interest. On 14 October he asked Raeder to confirm that the Navy would be able to transport troops and supplies in case it were decided, as part of the plan against Gibraltar, to occupy the Canaries, the

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Azores or the Cape Verdes. Raeder agreed that this would be possible provided that the ships got under way before the Air Force began the occupation. 'It would not be possible to occupy the islands first from the air and to bring up reinforcements by sea afterwards, for all approaches to the islands would then be patrolled by the enemy.' Hitler accordingly ordered 'the whole question to be investigated and the necessary preparations to be made'. Nine days later he followed up his correspondence with Franco with a personal visit, which had been arranged for 23 October at Hendaye. At this meeting¹ he made formal request for military passage through Spain for an attack on the Rock, and wanted Franco's agreement on the spot. But Franco evaded him, and he had to be content with the promise that the Caudillo would think about it, and would write his reply.

IV

This was the situation when, on 28 October 1940, Italy invaded Greece, providing, all at once and almost overnight, a proof of her own weakness, a striking illustration of the disunity of the Axis Powers and a warning that the Mediterranean, for all its possibilities, contained its dangers as well.

Germany had received no warning in advance of the Italian move; 'on no occasion,' wrote Raeder on 4 November, 'was authorisation for such an independent action given to the Duce by the Führer'. There had been a general understanding between the two Governments that Italy would attack Greece in due course, and a German suspicion that Mussolini was itching to act. But it had been the German view, as Ribbentrop told Mussolini on 19 September 1940,² that 'it was better not to touch on these problems for the time being, but to concentrate on the destruction of England instead'; and the extent of the annoyance felt in Germany when this advice was not heeded may be judged, not only from

¹ See *The Spanish Government and the Axis*, Document No. 8, for the minutes of this meeting.

² *N.D.*, 1842-PS.

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Raeder's comment, but also from the fact that Hitler, hearing that the attack was about to be launched, in a fruitless last-minute attempt to meet Mussolini and stop the plan, diverted to Florence the train in which he was returning from Hendaye.¹ He was four hours too late and had to content himself with a letter to Mussolini, undated but sent soon after the event.²

When I asked you [ran this letter] to receive me at Florence, it was with the hope that I could make my thoughts known to you before the threatening conflict with Greece, of which I had received only general knowledge. I wanted to ask you to postpone the battle. . . . In any case, I wanted you not to undertake it without a previous lightning occupation of Crete. . . .

The Italian action and the German comments on it are remarkable indications of the state of Italo-German relations, scarcely a month after the signature of the Ten Years Pact between Germany, Italy and Japan on 27 September 1940. Italy, no doubt, was partly responsible: 'the Italians', Raeder had said on 26 September 1940, 'have not yet realised the danger when they refuse our help'. But it is legitimate to suppose that much of the fault also lay in the spirit and the method with which that help was offered, and that German shortcomings in this respect were inherent in the situation. The dominant one of two countries, each bent on a war of conquest, each run by a dictator, could not, perhaps, be always tactful or seem sufficiently pleasant, even to the other—especially if the dominant country was Germany under Hitler's régime. But it is also a significant comment on Hitler as a strategist that, on top of his early neglect of the Mediterranean, his efforts to smooth the path of Italo-German relations, and to develop with Italy any system for the joint planning of operations, were always too little and too late.

In any event, the Italian attack on Greece was regarded in Germany, to quote again from Raeder's minutes of 4 November, as 'definitely a regrettable blunder'; which was nothing less than

¹ See Goering's testimony on this, *N.D. (C. and A.)*, Supplement B, p. 1107.

² *N.D.*, 2762-PS.

the truth. Apart from the fact that the Italian Armies fared badly from the outset at the hands of the Greeks, Italy's action enabled Great Britain to improve her position in the Eastern Mediterranean by occupying Crete and islands in the Aegean. The move from Alexandria to Crete halved the distance between British bases and the Italian supply lines to North Africa; the British advance into the Aegean, to be followed by operations in the Greek mainland, threatened German interests in the Balkans, and particularly the Roumanian oil-fields, for the greater control and protection of which German military missions and troops had entered Roumania on 7 October. The possibilities were alarming; and Hitler was alarmed.

As a direct result, all plans under discussion for operations in the Eastern Mediterranean were hurriedly abandoned in favour of emergency measures. Hitler's decisions were announced on 4 November; they were confirmed in a directive on 12 November.¹ The plan to send Panzer divisions to North Africa, to help the Italians in a drive against Suez, was dropped on the grounds that 'the actual attack on Alexandria, for which the participation of our divisions was planned, cannot now be expected until mid-1941'. The directive of 12 November added that 'the intervention of German forces will be considered, if at all, only when the Italians reach Mersa Matruh; even then, operations by the German Air Force will not be instituted until the Italians have set up the necessary air bases'. It was also announced on 4 November that 'action against Turkey for the purpose of breaking through to Suez from the east via Syria'—a variation of Raeder's earlier suggestion—had been abandoned because, in view of the improved British position in the Eastern Mediterranean, this would be 'a very lengthy operation and would involve very great difficulties'.

Different and immediate steps were demanded by the new situation. Because the Roumanian oil-fields were 'endangered by British forces on Lemnos', anti-aircraft reinforcements and fighter and fighter-bomber aircraft were to be sent to Roumania at once.

¹ *N.D.*, 444-PS. *N.D.*, 147-C also contains this directive.

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Chiefly to protect Roumania against British infiltration and attack, but also to help the Italians in Greece, the German Army had been ordered to prepare an attack on Greece with ten divisions, through Roumania and Bulgaria, in the direction of Salonika. On 12 November the object of this operation was defined as that of 'forming a base for German air attacks in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly against English air bases which threaten the Roumanian oil-fields'.

The Italian action also threatened to disturb the German plans for an attack on Gibraltar and for the seizure of some of the Atlantic islands. Already difficult enough, these problems became, in the words of a memorandum of 29 October,¹ 'a particularly ticklish business' in the light of the new situation in the Mediterranean. 'No activity', continued this memorandum, 'should be expected at present on the part of Spain. . . . The Gibraltar affair should not be lost to mind, but it will have to be treated with extreme care. . . .' These plans, however, were further advanced than those for action in the Eastern Mediterranean, and they were not abandoned. If anything, objectives in the Western Mediterranean took on additional importance in the light of Eastern Mediterranean developments. 'The Führer', it was announced on 4 November, 'is determined to occupy Gibraltar as soon as possible'; and it was then thought, in spite of the first reaction to the Italian attack on Greece, that Franco 'is obviously prepared to enter the War on Germany's side within a short time'.² Preparations were already in hand for the despatch of German troops to Spain; and Hitler now ordered an advance reconnaissance unit of about fifty officers to be got ready to leave.

The Gibraltar plan had received a good deal of Hitler's attention in the past month; there can be no doubt of his interest in it and his determination to carry it out if possible; and most of the meeting of 4 November, and of the directive of 12 November, was taken up with a recital of the detailed decisions he had reached

¹ *N.D.*, 376-PS.

² Possibly because Spain took over the Government of Tangier on this date.

concerning it. Germany's intentions would be obvious as soon as her troops were massed on the Spanish frontier; he had therefore decided that air attacks on the fleet in Gibraltar should begin as soon as the troops were assembled for crossing into Spain. Simultaneously, the Portuguese Cape Verde Islands—a late addition to the plan—were to be seized from the air, while the German occupation of the Canaries—hardly an invasion since the plan assumed Spanish collaboration, but requiring, nevertheless, the transfer of German troops for defence purposes—was also to take place by air at the same time. In conjunction with the capture of the Cape Verdes, three German divisions were to advance through Spain to the Portuguese frontier, to counteract any British attempt to gain a footing there. And all these operations, known collectively as operation 'Felix', were to begin at an early date if all went well.¹

Their object, according to the directive of 12 November, was to expel the British from the Western Mediterranean. Political measures for Spain's early entry into the War, continued the directive, had been taken and were necessary if Gibraltar was to be seized and the Straits closed; the undertaking had to be extended to include the Atlantic islands because these would 'assume great importance after the occupation of Gibraltar for English naval warfare'. It was, in fact, essential to the success of the Gibraltar operation that they should be taken as well;² and so anxious was Hitler on this score that, having already added the Cape Verdes to

¹ The directive of 12 November mentioned no target date, but the date for the crossing of German troops was later fixed for 10 January 1941 (see *The Spanish Government and the Axis*, Document No. 11) and in a letter to Mussolini on 31 December 1940 (quoted in Mr Churchill's *The Second World War*, Vol. III ('The Grand Alliance'), pp. 10-13 from *Hitler e Mussolini, Lettere e Documenti*) Hitler stated that D-day for the crossing of the Spanish frontier had been fixed for 10 January 1941, and that the attack on Gibraltar had been scheduled for the beginning of February.

² British plans, should Spain yield to German pressure and Gibraltar become unusable, included the seizure of some of these islands and, if the Portuguese Government would agree, the setting up of a base in the Cape Verdes. See W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. II ('Their Finest Hour'), p. 553.

the Canaries, he hoped to add Madeira and the Azores to both. 'The question of the occupation of the Azores and Madeira,' added the directive, 'I also wish investigated. The results of these investigations are to be placed before me as soon as possible.'

Plans for French North-West Africa were much less advanced; but they, too, were retained. The intention was to persuade the Vichy Government to undertake the protection of the French colonies against the Western Powers and to undertake operations—particularly an attack on British West Africa—to offset the growing threat of British or American intervention. At the same time, however, Hitler was determined to proceed with the disarmament of metropolitan France. The Vichy Government were exploiting this inconsistency—the threat of disarmament at home, the offer of freedom and the demand for help in the colonies—for bargaining purposes. On 4 November 'final clarification' in the German-Vichy negotiations was still lacking; and Raeder emphasised, on that date, another difficulty to be overcome. Although, on 26 September, Hitler had been 'obviously reluctant to release additional French forces at Toulon', the collaboration of the Vichy Government for the protection of the French colonies implied, in Raeder's opinion, the granting to it of complete freedom in the use of the French Fleet. But the Italians were already objecting that Germany allowed too much freedom to France; and Raeder thought that nothing less was required than 'a completely different attitude by the Italians on the question of French disarmament' before the German plans could proceed.

Hitler was still determined, in spite of these difficulties, to force through his North-West African policy, as well as the operations against Gibraltar and the islands. The directive of 12 November defined its object as that of 'working with France to continue the war against England with all possible efficiency. . . . The most pressing duty of the French is the defensive and offensive security of their African possessions against England and the de Gaulle movement. From this initial task, the part of France in the war against England may be fully developed'.

V

One other item in the directive of 12 November was the project for an attack on Russia; one other result, if only indirectly, of the Italian attack on Greece was to increase Hitler's interest in this project as the solution for all his problems.

At first sight the Italian move, and the British exploitation of the subsequent Italian reverses, should have induced him to postpone even further any consideration of an Eastern campaign; for, to the existing deterrent, to the fact that Great Britain was still fighting, they added yet another, the fact that they led him to exaggerate the strength of the British position in the Eastern Mediterranean. But if the British threat from that area, not only to Italy but also to Germany, caused him immediate concern, it was also the case that the obvious counter-stroke was a German advance through the Balkans to Greece; and this was bound to increase the present strain on Russo-German relations. His interest, moreover, in an attack on Russia had become increasingly connected, since the failure of 'Sea Lion', with his frustration on other fronts, and the events which followed the Italian attack on Greece, leading him to abandon all offensive possibilities in the Middle East, added to that frustration.

It is true that Russo-German relations had begun to deteriorate before Hitler decided on the attack on Greece, as a result of Germany's infiltration into Roumania.¹ It must also be admitted that the events which followed the Italian attack on Greece might not have increased his interest in an Eastern campaign if the attack on Russia had not already been in his mind, if the planning of a possible Eastern campaign had not already begun. But Russo-German relations had so much recovered by 30 October that the

¹ In September 1940 the Russians had sharply criticised the Vienna Award, regarding the German guarantee to Roumania as directed against Russia. Early in October the despatch of German military missions to Roumania added to Russia's anxiety and distrust. See *N.D.*, 170-C, items 80 to 92, and *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941*.

German Naval Staff could note in its war diary on that date that 'a war with Russia no longer seems probable';¹ the planning that had already begun was concerned only with the hypothetical case of an attack on Russia, as well as being complicated by Hitler's reluctance to open a war on two fronts. It was in these circumstances that the events in the Eastern Mediterranean had their effect. By inducing Hitler to abandon the Middle East, to determine on the defensive occupation of the Balkans and Greece and to conclude that Great Britain was further than ever from being defeated, they brought the idea of an attack on Russia, even in a war on two fronts, more into the foreground than it had been so far.

On 4 November, at his first meeting after the Italian attack on Greece, Raeder was told that Hitler 'still anticipated that Russia will remain neutral', in spite of the German advance through the Balkans; but he was also told that 'preparations for an Eastern campaign, as well as for "Sea Lion" in the spring, have to be continued according to the Führer's decision'. In the directive of 12 November² it was laid down that, although a political conference was about to be held with Molotov 'to clarify Russia's attitude for the time being', 'preparations already ordered verbally for an Eastern campaign will be continued, whatever the results of this conference'. Hitler had almost made up his mind: 'directives', added the announcement of 12 November, 'will be issued later, when I have seen and approved the Army's fundamental plan of operations'.

The conference with Molotov on 12-14 November did nothing to change the situation.³ Hitler stood out against a renewed Russian attack on Finland; Molotov would give no assurance. Molotov demanded agreement to a Russian guarantee to Bulgaria; Hitler

¹ *N.D.*, 170-C, item 94. On 13 October Ribbentrop had proposed to the Russian Government an extension of Russo-German co-operation and had suggested that Russia should join the new Berlin-Rome-Tokio pact. Stalin had accepted this offer on 22 October. (See *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941*).

² *N.D.*, 444-PS and 147-C.

³ *N.D.*, 170-C, item 99; *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941*.

could not commit himself to this; and he was tempted to regard the conference as the failure of the last attempt to forestall the impending breach between the two countries.

Yet the attack on Russia was still not ordered, and not merely because it was not necessary to order it so long in advance. Hitler was not the man to delay announcements when his mind was made up. He was still reluctant to make the decision. He still had lingering doubts. At the conference with Molotov he again developed the idea that had been attracting him for some time, the idea of encouraging Russian expansion towards Iran and India. On 14 November the most that Raeder could say—he may not have known the real position but he would not have underestimated the danger—was that Hitler was ‘still inclined towards a demonstration with Russia’.

VI

What kept him undecided was the obvious risk of attacking Russia while Great Britain was still at war with Germany. Raeder put this argument forcefully in his meeting with Hitler on 14 November. It was clear, he said, that Russia would not attack Germany, at least for another few years; it was imperative to postpone a German attack on Russia until Great Britain was defeated, as, ‘otherwise, demands on German forces would be too great, and an end to hostilities could not be foreseen’. On the first point Hitler did not disagree; the second argument was one which he fully understood. For the early defeat of Great Britain, although the chances were steadily declining, was still his chief strategic aim.

‘Sea Lion’, however slight its prospects, had not been cancelled. A directive of 12 October 1940 had admitted that the chief purpose behind its continued readiness was to maintain political and military pressure on England. It had confessed to some doubt as to whether the operation would ever be revived: ‘should the invasion be reconsidered in the spring or early summer of 1941, orders for a renewal of operational readiness will be issued later’. But it had

also directed that 'military conditions for a late invasion are to be improved', an order which Raeder, on 14 October, interpreted to mean that 'constant manoeuvres' were to be carried out.

As a result of the developments which followed the Italian attack on Greece, Hitler became more determined that planning should proceed for a possible attack on Russia; but not to the extent of abandoning 'Sea Lion'. On the other hand, as Hitler knew full well, the prospects for 'Sea Lion' were diminishing with every month that passed; with every month the British defence position was improving. The directive of 12 November seemed to recognise this, for it showed Hitler to be more emphatic than on 4 November about the planning of the Russian campaign and correspondingly more dubious about 'Sea Lion'. Where Russia was concerned, it was announced that 'directives will be issued as soon as I have approved the fundamental plan of operations by the Army'; the most that could be said about 'Sea Lion' was that 'in the event of a change in the general situation the possibility or necessity of reconsidering operation "Sea Lion" might arise in the spring'.

It was in the air, in particular, where supremacy was so vital if the existing 'Sea Lion' plan was ever to be launched, that a change in the situation was required. 'The air attacks on Britain', Raeder reported on 14 November, 'have not up to now created the conditions necessary for carrying out "Sea Lion"'. Naval vessels are still stationed in harbours like Plymouth and Portsmouth. The situation must change before any new attempt to carry out "Sea Lion" is made.' And Hitler himself 'confirmed the fact that attacks by the Air Force have not achieved the anticipated results . . . '.

But his anxiety to end the war with Great Britain was still so great that, in spite of all his doubts, the directive of 12 November went on to say that, in case 'Sea Lion' should be revived, 'each branch of the Armed Forces is to exert itself strenuously to improve its position'. It was still so great that, some time between 14 November and 3 December, in view of the still unfavourable air situation in the Narrows, Hitler asked the Naval Staff to

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investigate the possibility of invading Southern Ireland. There might be political and military advantages in adopting this less direct route to the British Isles.

Reporting back on 3 December, tabling a memorandum the title of which—*The Question of supporting Ireland against Britain*—sufficiently indicates the sort of political advantage Hitler had in mind, Raeder objected to the idea. To be successful, it would require naval supremacy, which Germany did not and could never possess; in view of the great distance, the supply line could never be defended; the island had no defended bases or anchorages, and although the Irish might willingly open their ports, they would also be open 'to the enemy pursuing us'; air support, which would have to come from occupied Europe, would be dependent on the weather, and that was notorious in Ireland. From every point of view, 'it would not be possible to follow up an Irish request for help'.

Hitler did not quite agree; he was more reluctant than Raeder to abandon the Irish project. He admitted that the operation was impossible in the existing circumstances: 'a landing in Ireland can be attempted only if Ireland requests help'. But it might be possible if the Eire Government would co-operate. And because Ireland would be important as a base for air attacks on the north-west ports of Great Britain, because 'the occupation of Ireland might lead to the end of the War', he insisted that inquiries should be made to see whether Ireland would like support, and that investigation into the operational conditions should continue.

VII

If the Irish idea is an indication not only of his wish to bring Great Britain to terms, but also of the frustration with which he regarded the existing and more orthodox invasion plan, further contemplation on the prospects of an occupation of Southern Ireland can have done nothing to reduce his frustration. Nor can it have helped that his Mediterranean plans, limited and made more

precise by the Italian attack on Greece, were meanwhile subjected to further stress and strain.

The chief difficulty arose, once again, from the British command of the sea and from Germany's lack of a surface fleet. Just as any possible German operations in the Eastern Mediterranean had been prevented by the British Navy's aggressive exploitation of the Italian reverses in Greece, so, in the West, the British command of the sea forced itself on German attention as the plans proceeded. Raeder had already warned Hitler, on 26 September 1940, that the real difficulty facing Germany's future plans—the difficulty which underlay all the political complications that were being met in negotiations with France and Spain—was British sea-power. 'The lack of an adequate fleet', he had said, 'will constitute a continual drawback in the case of further extension of the War, in the occupation, for example, of the Canary Islands, the Cape Verdes, the Azores, Dakar, Iceland, etc.' Now Raeder was forced to contemplate more closely the conduct of operations at long range, over sea areas; and the vision of the British Fleet, and his knowledge of Germany's weakness at sea, returned to trouble him.

It led him, on 4 November, to express 'fundamental objection' to Hitler's addition of the Cape Verde Islands to the plan for the seizure of Gibraltar. In Raeder's view this operation was dependent on French support and only possible 'if Dakar is in our hands'; and even then it would be difficult to carry out. Once they were seized, 'we could not be sure of holding the islands in view of the available forces'. Furthermore, while the islands would have no great value for the enemy, 'the political disadvantages resulting from our occupation of Portuguese territory, with possible retaliation by Britain and the U.S.A. against the Azores, Portugal proper and the Portuguese colonies, must be regarded as very serious'. Similarly, if the Cape Verde idea was abandoned, it would be advisable to move no divisions up to the Portuguese frontier. 'Any German action against Portugal would afford the British the possibility of occupying the Portuguese colonies of Madeira, the Cape Verdes and the Azores.'

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Hitler, however, was set upon these additions to the plan: Raeder noted that he would 'have to talk to the Führer at some length, since he is apparently very much in favour of an operation against the Cape Verdes'. And, rather than abandon it, he used Raeder's arguments as a reason for extending its scope. The capture of the Cape Verdes had come to seem essential to him, if the operation against Gibraltar was to succeed; and if the occupation of the Cape Verdes might lead the enemy to take the Azores and Madeira, then he felt, as already noted, that Germany must consider taking the Azores and Madeira as well.

Two days after this decision was announced in the directive of 12 November, Raeder returned to the attack. The Canaries, he agreed, would be important to Great Britain if Germany seized Gibraltar, and they must therefore be taken by Germany in advance. But the Cape Verdes and Madeira would be of no use to Great Britain. The neutrality of Portugal, on the other hand, was invaluable to Germany and its violation would result in the immediate occupation of the Azores by Great Britain or the U.S.A. As for Hitler's reaction to this, the suggestion that the Azores should also be occupied by Germany in advance, that would be a most risky undertaking. With luck, it is true, it would succeed at first; but it was doubtful whether there were even adequate unloading facilities for an occupation, and 'the possibility of holding the islands is quite unlikely in view of the strong British offensive which would certainly be carried out'.

Hitler was not to be moved. It is true that he dropped the subject of Madeira; but he was convinced that Great Britain would occupy the Azores as soon as German troops entered Spain, whether or not the Cape Verdes were attacked. In any case, he was interested in these islands 'with a view to prosecuting the war against America at a later stage', and the Azores would afford him 'the only facility for attacking America, if she should enter the War, with modern aircraft'.¹ If it was not certain, he decided

¹ This additional reason for his interest in the Atlantic islands had already been mentioned in a memorandum of 29 October 1940 (C.D., 376-PS).

on 14 November, that loading facilities in the Azores were adequate, then a naval and an air officer must be sent at once to make sure. Far from abandoning the Cape Verdes plan as a result of Raeder's arguments, he showed himself more than ever determined to add the Azores to the list of objectives.

Yet he was now aware of the importance of sea-power, and of Germany's weakness in this respect. In the failure of 'Sea Lion' he had learned to regret his pre-war policy and the lack of a surface fleet. During the preparations for the attack on Gibraltar he had begun to wonder, assuming that all its defences would be destroyed by the German Air Force, how he could effectively close the Straits and prevent a British counter-attack by sea. Even if all the Atlantic islands were seized in advance, Germany had no fleet, Italy—characteristically enough—was not being asked to assist, and the problem of preventing a British recapture of Gibraltar began to seem insoluble. Grappling with this difficulty, he could not have remained unconcerned about his own lack of ships; and if he insisted, despite this fact and despite Raeder's arguments, that the seizure of the Cape Verdes and the Azores, as well as of the Canaries, should remain part of the Gibraltar plan, it was precisely because he knew, by now, what sea-power could achieve. 'The Führer', said Raeder on 14 November, 'expects good results from the seizure of Gibraltar and the closing of the Mediterranean in the west'; and he was determined to make his plans so comprehensive that his hopes would not again be dashed by the long arm of the British Navy.¹

Thus Raeder was overruled; but the effect of his arguments against occupying the Cape Verdes and the Azores was still to increase Hitler's doubts, to lower his hopes, about the prospects for his remaining Mediterranean plans. Raeder could be overruled; but what if he were right? What if it should prove impossible to take and hold these islands? What, even supposing they were taken, what if the British should still counter-attack at Gibraltar?

¹ For British plans for the Atlantic islands, in the event of a German attack on Gibraltar, see n 2, p. 105, above.

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And was it not becoming clearer with every argument that, whatever the success of these plans, Great Britain would still be able to continue the War?

If he had ever hoped for a more decisive result from the occupation of Gibraltar, the Naval Staff contrived in yet another way to lower his expectations. In a memorandum dated 14 November 1940 they pointed out that 'the occupation of Gibraltar and the control of the Western Mediterranean, although very important, are not enough in themselves'. As a result of the Italian attack on Greece, the argument continued, the British strategic position in the Eastern Mediterranean, and British prestige in the Balkans and Middle East, had immensely improved. The possible consequences of this were 'that the Eastern Mediterranean will not develop as Germany has planned', that Great Britain would take the initiative 'with adverse effects in the Eastern Mediterranean and the African area and thus on all future warfare', and that the British position would become so strong that 'it will no longer be possible to drive the British Fleet from the Mediterranean'. The Naval Staff were convinced that it was of decisive importance to prevent these developments, of which a foretaste had already been received in the Fleet Air Arm attack on the Italian Fleet in Taranto on 11-12 November. They argued that the threat from Great Britain and the U.S.A. 'forces us not only to form a European Union, but also to fight for the African area as the foremost strategic object of German warfare as a whole,' and to do so with an early offensive against the Alexandria-Suez area.

Italy, left to herself, would 'never carry out the Egyptian offensive'. 'The German leaders responsible for the conduct of the war must . . . take into account the fact that no special operational activity, or substantial relief or support, can be expected from the Italian armed forces.' They must also see that 'Germany should certainly not be a disinterested spectator in the Eastern Mediterranean, in view of the close connection between victorious German warfare and the Mediterranean-African problem'. As Italy would not act, Germany must act herself. 'The enemy should be forced

out of the Mediterranean by utilising every conceivable possibility. The entire Greek peninsula, including the Peloponnesus, must be cleared of the enemy, and all bases occupied.' Italy should be forced to begin the Egyptian offensive, and German troops should be sent to help. 'In spite of all the difficulties, an offensive through Turkey can hardly be avoided.' The Suez Canal should be mined. All these operations were essential, in addition to the seizure of Gibraltar and the closing of the Mediterranean in the west, if Germany was to win the war.

These arguments were not altogether inconsistent with Hitler's own ideas. He intended to take Gibraltar; but he knew that that would not be enough. 'Sea Lion', if it could be launched, or the alternative occupation of Ireland—these might win the war; but the capture of Gibraltar was unlikely to have that result. He had already determined to secure the Balkans as well, and his preparatory measures were about to take effect. The King of Bulgaria was summoned to Germany on 17 November; Roumania announced her adherence to the Axis on 21 November. He had already ordered the invasion of Greece. When the moment came he extended his thrust to Crete. But, in going so far on the Mediterranean front, he was guided solely by the needs of defence; and the further extension of the war into the Middle East, as advocated by the Naval Staff, whatever the forcefulness of Raeder's arguments, made little appeal. On the contrary, the Mediterranean was a theatre which seemed full, to him, of uncertainties and dangers, not the least of which, since the Italian attack on Greece, was the problem of collaboration with Italy. Even in the Western Mediterranean, where this problem could be avoided, the uncertainties of Franco's attitude, the bargaining of Vichy, the vicious circle of arguments with Raeder about the Atlantic islands—these circumstances had all been working for weeks to convince him that the chances for success were limited.

VIII

Against this background, in proportion as his frustration and impatience mounted in the West and in the Mediterranean, his

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thoughts turned increasingly to the idea of an attack on Russia. An attack on Russia and the development of Middle East projects, as advocated by the Naval Staff, were mutually exclusive policies: Germany could not do both at once. And Hitler knew which he preferred. If 'Sea Lion' and an invasion of Southern Ireland were impracticable, and if operations against Gibraltar or in the Middle East seemed unlikely to give him his quick victory over Great Britain, the next best thing would be a quick and stupendous victory elsewhere. British sea-power and Germany's impotence in that direction made the chances in the Mediterranean uncertain; but there was nothing, on the other hand, to stop an attack on Russia. And as it would be an attack on a land power, who could doubt that Germany would quickly make an impression? It would also regain the initiative for Germany; and he could not tolerate the feeling, so vivid when he thought of 'Sea Lion' or contemplated his Mediterranean plans, that the initiative had begun to pass to the enemy. It would satisfy, moreover, his growing impatience with Russia.

Since the conference with Molotov he had continued to pursue, in proposals addressed to Russia for extended collaboration, the idea of diverting her towards the Indian Ocean, as an alternative to attacking her. But he had also continued the planning of an Eastern campaign; and when he received the Russian counter-proposals of 26 November, he was strengthened in his conviction that the end had come. For they included demands for the withdrawal of German troops from Finland, for a Russian guarantee to Bulgaria and for Russian bases at the Dardanelles.¹

For another reason, a final decision, one way or the other, was becoming an urgent necessity. A document containing the 'Basic Facts for a History of the German War Economy'² reveals the confusion which had resulted, by this time, from Hitler's continued indecision on all fronts. 'The Army', it records, 'were urging the high priority of the programme of equipment for North African

¹ See *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941*.

² *N.D.*, 2353-PS, pp. 323-4.

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operations, the Navy demanded the acceleration of measures for "Sea Lion", air armaments were being even more intensified . . . ; and, in this situation, the war production authorities were forced to point out 'the difficulties of accelerating everything at the same time . . . ', especially as Goering 'on 6 November 1940 had stated, for the first time, that we should prepare ourselves for a long war'.

As a result of this warning some decisions were taken, this document goes on to record, on 3 December 1940. One was to the effect that 'there is no longer to be any mention of an invasion of England, but only of a siege of England. . . . For the time being . . . "Sea Lion" preparations were merely to be concluded. . . .' Another placed 'aerial defence of the homeland at the top of the list for the first time'. The third 'instruction' of 3 December concerned Russia; but it was anything but a decision. 'The prospective big action (Russia) was mentioned [to the war production authorities] for the first time', and its postponement to some later date admitted as possible.'

Thus, even in these circumstances, Hitler could not make up his mind about the Eastern campaign, and, though he could at last be definite about 'Sea Lion', it was on the same day, 3 December, that he discussed Southern Ireland and ordered investigations to proceed. Two days later, it is true, on 5 December, when the Chief of the General Staff of the Army reported to him about 'the planned operation in the East',¹ he could emphasise that 'the first commitment of German forces should take place in such a way as to make the annihilation of strong enemy units possible, so that the Russians should not take up positions in the rear again. . . '. He could also confirm that 'the number of divisions planned for the entire operation—130-140—is sufficient'. And, in a sense, this was the approval of 'the Army's fundamental plan of operations' which, he had previously said, would be the signal for the issuing of directives. By themselves, however, his remarks did not amount to a firm decision, and, inasmuch as on 3 December, even if 'Sea

¹ *N.D.*, 1799-PS.

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Lion' had been definitely abandoned for the moment, he could still order a study of the possibilities of occupying Southern Ireland, inasmuch as directives for an Eastern campaign were still not issued, Hitler continued to hesitate. So strong was the obvious argument against attacking Russia before the end of the war with Great Britain that, in spite of his predilection for the Eastern campaign, in spite of his irritation at the Russian counter-proposals, in spite of the urgent need for firm decisions, he remained undecided until he received a further shock.

IX

In so far as it was still not quite a foregone conclusion, his decision was made for him, these three most critical and uncertain months of the War were brought to an end, by the opening of the first British Western Desert offensive on 6 December 1940. The success which, beginning with the Battle of Sidi Barrani on 9 December, that offensive so soon achieved had an immediate effect on Hitler's plans and an immense influence on the future course of the War. By alarming Franco, it led directly to the collapse of the German plan for the capture of Gibraltar. By alarming Hitler, by convincing him that Great Britain was further than ever from surrender or defeat, by seeming to confirm his lack of faith in Mediterranean and Middle East adventures, it sealed his determination to turn on Russia.

The first necessity was to bolster the Italians in their retreat. The reinforcement of North Africa, which had not seemed worthwhile in November because it would not lead to early success, now seemed to be essential if disaster was to be avoided. On 10 December the day after the Battle of Sidi Barrani, Hitler reversed his earlier decision and ordered formations of the German Air Force 'to operate as soon as possible from the South of Italy, for a limited time. Their most important task is to attack the British Navy in Alexandria but also in the Suez Canal . . . and in the Straits between Sicily and the north coast of Africa, owing to the critical situation

in the Mediterranean. . . .’ At the same time, preparations were accelerated for the despatch of at least one Panzer division to North Africa.

A further source of alarm was the possibility that, if the British attack proved to be a major offensive and led to a serious deterioration in the position of the Axis in the Mediterranean, unoccupied France would rise against Germany. This was not an unreasonable anxiety. Mr Churchill, who was ‘most anxious to give Vichy the chance to profit by the favourable turn of events’, invited Petain to resume the war against the Axis on 31 December, and a British force of six divisions was got ready to land in Morocco if the French showed signs of accepting.¹ Again on 10 December, therefore, Hitler ordered an emergency operation to be mounted: operation ‘Attila’.

In case [reads Hitler’s directive] a movement of revolt should arise in parts of the French Colonial Empire now under the command of General Weygand, preparation must be made for the speedy occupation of the territory of the French motherland which is still unoccupied. At the same time, it will be necessary for the French Home Fleet and that part of the French Air Force which is on home airfields to be safeguarded, or at least hindered from going over to the enemy.

If the operation became necessary—‘if the French Armed Forces show opposition, or any part of the Fleet, in spite of German counter-orders, puts to sea’—heavy German motorised groups, with air support, would march into unoccupied France, penetrate at once to the Mediterranean and seize the ports, especially Toulon, in order to ‘blockade France from the sea’. All opposition would be ‘ruthlessly broken’. And as, under this scheme, it was difficult to see how the French Fleet could be held,

examination is also to be made by the Commanders-in-Chief of the Navy and Air Force as to how the French Fleet can best be put into our power in conjunction with the march-in of our military forces,

¹ See W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. II (‘Their Finest Hour’), pp. 550-1. For Hitler’s anxiety about Vichy see also his letter to Mussolini of 31 December 1940, quoted in Mr Churchill’s *The Second World War*, Vol. III (‘The Grand Alliance’), pp. 10-13 from *Hitler e Mussolini, Lettere e Documenti*.

with particular reference to blocking harbour entrances, mounting air-landing operations, planning acts of sabotage, preparing U-boat and air attacks on escaping ships and disarming the French ships in advance in accordance with the provisions of the Armistice Agreement.

As usual, 'the Italians must not have any knowledge of the preparations made or action contemplated'.

An equally direct result of the British advance was the postponement of the German attack on Gibraltar, the success of which would have done so much, as Hitler complained to Mussolini in a letter of 31 December,¹ to eliminate 'the danger of a French change-over in North-West Africa'. In spite of all the difficulties, German planning of this operation had proceeded. By 30 November the difficulties had been met or smoothed over, and a detailed schedule had been worked out. The German Navy had received a statement of its tasks: the defence of Gibraltar, once it was conquered, the control of the Straits; support for the occupation and defence of the Canaries; the occupation of the ports of Vigo, Ferrol, Cadiz and Malaga. No date had been fixed, as Franco's co-operation, though indispensable, was still not certain. But the attempt was imminent when Great Britain launched her offensive in the Western Desert.

Franco immediately deserted the Axis; probably—though it seems to have been Spain who took the initiative in making promises to Germany in the summer before the failure of 'Sea Lion'—he now welcomed the chance to do so. On 7 December, the day after the British offensive was launched, Admiral Canaris presented to the Spanish Government the proposal from Hitler that German troops should cross into Spain on 10 January 1941; but it was politely explained to him that it was impossible for Spain to enter into the War on the suggested date.² 'Spain', wrote Hitler to Mussolini in the letter of 31 December, 'profoundly troubled by the situation, which Franco thinks has

¹ Quoted in W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. III ('The Grand Alliance'), pp. 10-13.

² See *The Spanish Government and the Axis*, Document No. 11.

deteriorated, has refused to collaborate'; and as Hitler was to be told a few weeks later, he 'will not take part in the war until Britain is on the point of collapse'. Accordingly, on 11 December, a third emergency instruction from Hitler's headquarters announced that 'operation "Felix" will not be carried out as the political conditions no longer obtain'. The plan was not cancelled. The preparations were too advanced for such hasty action, and Hitler, as he told Mussolini in the letter of 31 December, 'still had the hope, the slight hope, that Franco will realise at the last minute the catastrophic consequences of his conduct'. But, though it was decided that 'the investigations now proceeding are to be fully completed', the operation was indefinitely postponed: the 'German batteries which were to be sent to reinforce the Spanish islands and coast are not to be delivered'.

Yet another result of the British advance was that Hitler decided to increase the forces detailed for the attack on Greece, operation 'Marita'. In a final directive for that operation, issued on 13 December,¹ the objectives remained much as they had been when they were first defined in the earlier directive of 12 November. 'The British endeavour to create air bases under the protection of a Balkan front, which could be dangerous above all to Italy as well as to the Roumanian oil-fields, must be foiled.' It was therefore necessary, when the weather allowed, 'probably in March, to send a task force through Bulgaria to occupy the Aegean coast and, if necessary, to occupy the whole Greek mainland'. But though the objectives remained substantially unchanged, the number of divisions to be committed was increased from ten to twenty-four.

If this was partly because of the increased threat from Great Britain, it was also due to the fact that Hitler's attitude to the Eastern campaign had also advanced to its final stage in these few days after the opening of the British offensive. Once again, as at the beginning of November, threatening developments in the Mediterranean reduced his hesitation to turn on Russia when they should have increased it. 'After the completion of operation

¹ *N.D.*, 1541-PS.

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“Marita”,’ added the directive of 13 December, ‘I contemplate using the increased forces employed therein for a new undertaking.’ On 18 December 1940, after five more days of continued British success in Africa, days which saw all enemy troops driven from Egypt and Bardia surrounded, Hitler issued the first directive for the attack on Russia. It announced that ‘the German Armed Forces must be prepared to overthrow Russia in a rapid campaign, even before the end of the war with England’.¹

¹ *N.D.*, 446-PS.

CHAPTER VI

THE DECISION TO ATTACK RUSSIA

I

It was in July 1940, it is often said, that Hitler was first attracted by the possibility of an Eastern campaign. There is no doubt, according to one authority,¹ that by the end of September 1940 he had finally made up his mind to launch the attack. When he turned on Russia, in the words of another account,² he was 'flushed with success and intoxicated by the propaganda which hailed him as the greatest strategic genius of all time'. None of these judgments survives a close examination of the evidence.

It is true that Hitler's interest in an early attack on Russia first emerges in the documents in July 1940. But the documents, both before the War and —despite the Russo-German Pact—from the day the War began, leave no doubt that what was born in July 1940 was not simply the idea of an attack on Russia, which had long been in his mind, but the feeling that an attack on Russia, in a war on two fronts, before Great Britain was defeated or placated, in circumstances which he had never yet contemplated, might have to be considered. 'If it is not certain', he said, on 21 July, 'that preparations (for 'Sea Lion') can be completed by the beginning of September, other plans will have to be considered'; and his other remark on this occasion—'naturally it is our duty to deliberate the Russian and American questions carefully'—sufficiently indicated the direction his thoughts would take if 'Sea Lion' proved impracticable.

To this extent the abandonment of 'Sea Lion' in the second half

¹ W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. II ('Their Finest Hour'), p. 510.

² H. R. Trevor-Roper, *The Last Days of Hitler*, p. 9.

of September was clearly a major turning-point in Hitler's attitude towards the Russian undertaking. But there is a wealth of difference between this fact and the claim that his mind was quite made up by the end of September, as soon as 'Sea Lion' was abandoned. The decision to attack Russia was not reached as soon as 'Sea Lion' was postponed; and to claim that it was is to ignore the evidence or at least to read it in the light of later events.

It is arguable, of course, that, although the decision was not made at once, it was a foregone conclusion, that the failure of 'Sea Lion' led inevitably to the Russian decision. If that decision was the result of Hitler's predilection for great land campaigns, and of his fixed determination to turn on Russia, in any event, in due course, it was also due to his frustration on other fronts, his longing for action, his impatience for quick and resounding results; and the failure of 'Sea Lion' was vital in this connection. It had been magnificent: the conquest of Norway, magnificent the defeat of France; Great Britain should then have realised the hopelessness of her position. That she would not do so was Hitler's first serious setback. Only the Channel had given her comfort; and the Channel, which made 'Sea Lion' necessary, then made 'Sea Lion' impossible, which increased his desperation. It was the Channel again—or what it stood for: British strength and freedom at sea—which subsequently made it so difficult to bargain with France and Spain, which placed so many obstacles in the way of the capture of Gibraltar, and which limited in advance the effectiveness of that operation, even if it should succeed. What it seemed to amount to was that Germany was invincible if she could get into action; and action against Russia, in a great land campaign, became more and more tempting in proportion as Hitler was thwarted on other fronts.

Looked at from one point of view, this may be summed up as an inevitable process; but it is not legitimate, on all the evidence, to regard it as anything but a slow one. Even if it were a steady process, it was still spread over three whole months. To overlook that fact is not merely to ignore the evidence; it is to belittle the

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cumulative effect of the British command of the sea. And, when that effect is properly considered, even the view that Hitler's decision, however long he took to reach it, was a foregone conclusion—even that view loses much of its force.

For the British position at sea, so fundamental in the failure of 'Sea Lion', had more than a negative influence in the next three months. It did more than merely add to Hitler's frustration by rendering his plans for the Eastern Mediterranean and Gibraltar abortive, like 'Sea Lion', in their turn. By enabling Great Britain to take the offensive it also played a positive role. The events which followed the Italian attack on Greece, and then the first Western Desert offensive, these did not put the Russian idea into Hitler's head; the idea was already there. They did not revive the idea; for it had never died. But they alarmed him. And because, even as late as November and December 1940, such shocks were still necessary to destroy his hesitation about the Eastern campaign, they contributed to that three-month process which seems to have been inevitable, after the event, chiefly because they occurred.

It is true that these shocks should have had the opposite effect and that, if the idea had not already been in his mind, the increasing threat from the Mediterranean might have dissuaded him from the attack on Russia instead of encouraging him to make it. But another consideration helps to explain this point: alarm and frustration were not the only elements in the situation. There can be no doubt about the frustration to which he was reduced, by his temperament and cast of mind, by the series of disappointments which followed the defeat of France, by the fact that it was only then that he was brought face to face with hard facts and intricate problems. Hitler's disappointments, however, were as much the result of his failure in advance to plan beyond the fall of France, of his inability to adjust his plans to the circumstances which followed the failure of 'Sea Lion', of narrowness and inflexibility, of his lack of strategic powers, as they were the consequence of the difficulties and problems which the new situation undoubtedly contained. If, in the last three months of 1940, his strategy

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became desperate before it had need to be, we have not only ourselves and his temperament to thank for that, but also his intellectual and strategical limitations.

Frustration, moreover, the tendency to manufacture desperation, was only one side of his particular temperament; wilfulness and false confidence were the other, and logically complementary, characteristics. If he chose the Russian decision as a way out of his problems, as an escape from his frustration, he also chose it from a belief in his own genius, from an over-estimation of his own powers, from unlimited confidence in the German armies. If the decision was taken because of the alarming situation in the Mediterranean, which was the culmination of his growing frustration, it was also taken in spite of that situation, which illustrates his overboldness and his tendency to gamble.

When this has been admitted, frustration remains as a large element behind Hitler's decision; the process of reaching the decision would have been long if only because it was negative, a matter of reaction to this mounting frustration on other fronts; and, if that were all, it would still be enough to discount the view that Hitler was 'flushed with success and intoxicated with propaganda' when he reached it. But what made it certain that the process would take time, and what makes the 'intoxicated' view completely unacceptable, was the fact that Hitler's frustration had a particular source. His aim remained what it had always been: a short war and, as one more stage towards that goal, the early defeat of Great Britain or the early acceptance by her of his peace terms. More than ever, in the three months before the decision to turn on Russia, if only because of his anxiety to take that further step, the defeat or placation of Great Britain was what he wanted; and this is what he was denied. Many, no doubt, thought him victorious, but Hitler knew better. In this all-important aim he knew that he had failed.

The striking thing about the three months which followed the postponement of 'Sea Lion' was not the ease but the reluctance with which this aim was abandoned; not the fact that its frustration

rushed him into the Eastern campaign but the fact that its survival was the one thing which deterred him for so long. In face of all the evidence, 'Sea Lion' was kept alive until the beginning of December 1940 as a possible programme for the following spring; and it was only on 8 January 1941, three weeks after the Russian decision, that he openly confessed that 'Sea Lion' was 'now not feasible unless Britain is crippled to a considerable degree'. 'The success of the invasion', he went on, 'must be completely assured; otherwise the Führer considers it a crime to attempt it.' Projects like the occupation of Southern Ireland, as alternative to 'Sea Lion', were also considered as late as December.

Even after the issuing of the directive of 18 December 1940, there seems to be some reason for believing that an element of doubt and hesitation remained in his mind about the Russian decision, as well as a lingering hope that Great Britain might still be brought to give way. The directive itself had contained a saving clause: it stated that he would order the assembly of troops eight weeks before D-day 'if the operation is decided on'.¹ At the Nuremberg Trial Ribbentrop claimed that, without being enthusiastic about the idea, Hitler nevertheless let him suggest at the end of December 1940 that he might try to get Russia to join the Three-Power Pact; and that he said on that occasion: 'We have already made the present Pact, perhaps we will succeed with that too'.² On 31 December 1940, in a letter he wrote to Mussolini, Hitler himself emphasised that 'our present relations with the U.S.S.R. are very good', and gave several reasons for thinking there was 'considerable hope that we can resolve in a reasonable manner the remaining points at issue . . . and reach a solution which will avoid the worst . . .'.³ On 13 May 1941, asked by Mussolini whether Germany had quite excluded the possibility of collaboration with Russia against Great Britain, Ribbentrop replied

¹ *N.D.*, 446-PS.

² *Proceedings*, Part 10, p. 250. See also Frau Ribbentrop's affidavit, *Proceedings*, Part 11, p. 234.

³ Quoted in W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. III ('The Grand Alliance'), pp. 10-13.

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that, although he had become suspicious of Russia, Hitler had 'in no way come to any decision'.¹ On 20 April 1941 Hitler told Raeder that he had informed Matsuoka that Russia would not be touched if she behaved in a friendly way, according to the treaty; and when Raeder asked him, on the same occasion, for his opinion on the recognisable pro-German change in the Russian attitude, he 'replied as above'—presumably in the sense of his statement to Matsuoka.²

This evidence may easily be dismissed. The saving clause in the directive could be no more than a formal precaution; Ribbentrop's evidence is tainted and has no documentary support; it was not German policy to be frank with Italy and Japan about future plans; nor was Hitler always honest with Raeder. But if Hitler was at all doubtful, as seems quite likely, it was not about the wisdom of attacking Russia, but only about the advisability of attacking her while Germany was still at war with Great Britain; and there is no doubt whatever about his continued hankering for peace with Great Britain or for her early defeat. On 27 December, more than a week after the issuing of the Russian directive, the most he would admit about 'Sea Lion' was that 'in all probability it will not take place until the summer of 1941'. 'Even today', he said on 8 January 1941, when the Russian directive was three weeks old, 'the Führer is still ready to negotiate peace with Britain; but Britain's present leaders will not consider such a peace.' At the same time, he could not suppress the hope that Britain might yet be defeated. 'Combined assaults', he added on the same day, 'by the Air Force and Navy might lead to victory over Great Britain as early as July or August.' 'The attack on British imports', he stated in a directive of 6 February 1941, 'may lead before long to the collapse of British resistance.'

His remark on 8 January was an understatement: he was not merely ready to negotiate, he was desperate that he could not do so. His hopes, on the other hand, were wild and without foundation. But if these sentiments were alive after the Russian directive,

¹ *N.D.*, 1866-PS.

² *N.D.*, 170-C, item 150.

they were just as alive before it was issued; and it was on their account that, at least until 18 December 1940, he continued for so long to hesitate to turn on Russia. He was in no way deterred by the difficulties that might be met in Russia, or the vastness of the effort that might be required to compass her defeat. What deterred him was the danger of a war on two fronts, a danger sufficiently attested by all the rules of strategy. It was only gradually that he could come to accept what was for so long opposed to his own better judgment and what continued to be opposed to the better judgment of most of his advisers.

II

This anxiety for the defeat of Great Britain, or for her acceptance of his terms, if it long served to restrain him, also played a major part in the end in his conversion. Short of this anxiety, in spite of his temperament and his increasing frustration on other fronts, his reluctance to make the decision might never have been overcome; and his liking for a land campaign, his predisposition to turn on Russia, might well have been kept in check by the obvious risks of war on two fronts. But when the decision was finally made he had ceased to regard the attack on Russia as an end in itself; it had ceased to seem necessary as a step to forestall a Russian attack on Germany; it had come to be regarded as the only solution for the problems created by the British refusal to collapse.

His former disposition to make the attack for its own sake had rested on the assumption that he would make it in his own time, when the West had been dealt with. His anxiety as to Russia's intentions, though based on an earlier distrust of Russia, arose only when it seemed that he would have to launch an invasion of England and accept the risks of being tied down in the West; it lasted only so long as 'Sea Lion' seemed likely to be launched. Thereafter, the danger that Russia would turn on Germany, though it had been influential in bringing the Russian project to a head, had ceased to be a factor in his plans. He agreed that 'Russia is

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afraid of Germany's strength'; he was confident, even after he had decided to march through the Balkans into Greece, that Russia would remain neutral if left to choose. What made the attack on Russia seem more and more imperative was the fact that he came to regard it as the most effective way—as perhaps the only way that remained—of forcing Great Britain to surrender.

For if Great Britain would not come to terms, where did she place her hopes? In the intervention, obviously, of the United States and Russia on her side in due course. It was important to dash these hopes now that Great Britain had escaped defeat and refused a settlement. So long as Great Britain remained in the War, Germany could not win; the longer she remained in the War, the more the possibility would grow, if these dangers were not removed, that Germany would lose. Was it not advisable to eliminate these dangers in advance? Would that not force Great Britain to give way? On 27 December 1940, explaining his decision to Raeder, he said that it was 'necessary to eliminate at all costs the last remaining enemy on the continent before she can collaborate with Great Britain'. On 8 January 1941 he repeated this view.

Britain is sustained in her struggle by hopes placed in U.S.A. and Russia. . . . Britain's aim for some time to come will be to set Russia's strength in motion against us. If the U.S.A. and Russia should enter the war against Germany the situation would become very complicated. Hence any possibility for such a threat to develop must be eliminated at the very outset.

On 25 July 1941, when the Eastern campaign had begun, he was confident that 'Great Britain will not continue to fight if she sees there is no longer a chance of winning'.

Of those twin dangers, it is true, the American alone was a serious threat. If it seemed likely that the United States would turn on Germany, it seemed equally probable that Russia would not. Unfortunately, however, the American danger was the one against which he could do nothing directly effective in advance. There was nothing, on the other hand, no factor like sea-power, no power on earth, that could prevent him from attacking Russia.

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It is a measure both of Hitler's desperation and of his over-confidence that, in this situation, having first raised an attack on Russia from the level of possibility to the level of necessity, he then made, not a virtue, but two virtues of the necessity. He would not attack Russia simply in order to undermine Great Britain by removing Germany's last enemy on the continent; he would also attack her in the hope that precisely by this action the United States would be deterred from entering the War.

On 8 January 1941 he argued that 'if Russia collapsed Japan would be greatly relieved; this in turn would mean increased danger to the U.S.A.' Later in the year he became particularly anxious for the effect of the Russian campaign on the United States. On 21 June, the day before the campaign was opened, he 'wished to avoid any incident with the U.S.A. until "Barbarossa" [the attack on Russia] is well under way. After a few weeks the situation will become clearer and can be expected to have a favourable effect on America and Japan. America will have less inclination to enter the War, due to the threat from Japan which will then have increased.' On 9 July he was 'most anxious to postpone the United States' entry into the War for another one or two months A victorious campaign on the Eastern front will have a tremendous effect on the whole situation and probably also on the attitude of the U.S.A.'

This chain of argument had one serious defect. It was not complete; and not even Hitler was fully convinced by it. What was needed to substantiate his case and complete the circle was the conviction that Russia would attack Germany if Germany did not attack Russia. It is characteristic of Hitler that, having reached this point, he proceeded to convince himself that the Eastern campaign was unavoidable on this account. In this way he countered any doubt he had about the other arguments, and any hesitation he may have felt after issuing the directive of December 1940.

He arrived at this conviction only after the 'Barbarossa' directive had been issued. At the time it was issued he was, as already stated, confident that Russia would remain neutral, if not friendly,

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if left to choose. The evidence received in Germany continued to point so strongly to this view that he had to fly in the face of it in order to prove the opposite to his own satisfaction. In January 1941 a 'new, far reaching, German-Russian agreement' was signed on economic and border questions.¹ In February the German Chief of Naval Operations was convinced that 'Russian foreign policy is based on the wish for neutrality and on the avoidance of conflict with any strong powers'. In March, in spite of Russia's disapproval of German infiltration into the Balkans, 'a basic change in Russia's attitude is not anticipated' by the German authorities. In April, on the eve of the German attack on Greece, the German Naval Staff again noted that 'Russia is apparently firmly decided for neutrality towards Germany'. Later in the same month it rejoiced that 'Germany's success (in Greece) leads to a return of Russia to her previous correct attitude', that 'the Anglo-American attempt to activate Russia against the Axis' had failed, and that 'Russia's attitude to Germany continues to improve'.

Later still, Russia gave more positive signs of her attitude. There was, according to the Naval Staff on 21 April, 'a relief of Russo-Finnish tension as a result of Russia giving in, Russia being at present eager to avoid every incident'. The Russian May Day celebrations, according to the same source, 'show Russia striving by all means to keep out of the war'; and on 6 May the Chief of Naval Operations interpreted Stalin's appointment as chairman of the People's Commissars as due to 'the desire of Russia to continue the policy of avoiding war with Germany'. On 10 May Russia withdrew diplomatic recognition from Norway, Belgium and Yugoslavia in a further effort to placate Germany, and Stalin was again hailed in the German naval records as 'the bearer of German-Soviet co-operation'. On 4 June, 7 June and 15 June the German Naval Staff was still convinced that 'Russia is doing everything to

¹ For this and subsequent references see *N.D.*, 170-C, which is a file of notes on Russian relations kept by the German Naval Staff. In particular, items 104, 105, 107, 114, 116, 124, 125, 128, 132, 133, 137, 144, 146, 149, 151, 159, 166, 167, 169, 176.

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prevent a conflict', that 'Stalin is prepared to make extreme concessions'. On 6 June the German Ambassador in Moscow reported that Russia would only fight if attacked.

Notwithstanding all her efforts in this direction, Russia did, of course, dislike the German advance into the Balkans, and did take defensive military precautions on her western borders; and German fears on these grounds were not reduced by the anxious machinations of Russia's neighbours. In January 1941 Roumania was 'convinced that Russia plans the annexation of the Moldau¹ area' and hoped that 'Germany will prevent it by force'. At the same time, Russia was attempting to influence Bulgaria against joining the Axis; Russia warned Finland not to ally herself with any other State; and Germany received a Russian *démarche* against the entry of German troops into Roumania. In February the Finnish General Staff warned Germany that the Russian danger was still serious; and the obvious moral was that 'only Germany can beat Russia!' There was a further stiffening of the Russian attitude as a result of the German entry into Bulgaria on 1 March; in the middle of March German authorities noticed the first signs of partial Russian mobilisation on the Baltic and western frontiers. Towards the end of the month came the Russo-Turkish non-aggression pact, which was regarded 'by some as pointed against Germany' while, early in April, the pact signed between Russia and Yugoslavia 'after the Yugoslav *coup d'état* was evaluated as clearly pointed at Germany'. On 10 April, a few days after the opening of the attack on Greece, it was noted that Russia had declared a state of emergency and increased her military preparations.

There were grounds, no doubt, in all this activity, for German anxiety; but, after the German success in Greece and as soon as Russia saw that that advance was not turning on herself, there was a significant change in the Russian attitude, as already noted; and there are no references to anxiety on this score in the naval records after mid-April. And even before then, and even if that

¹ The River Moldau runs through Prague.

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change had not occurred, the stiffness of Russia's attitude could never conceal the essential fact that she intended to remain neutral if at all possible. No one in Germany overlooked this fact except Hitler; and he, in his anxiety to justify his decision to attack Russia, ignored it in characteristic fashion.

On 27 December 1940, ten days after issuing the 'Barbarossa' directive, he considered, apparently without a sense of the irony of his remarks, that 'the political situation has changed as a result of Russia's unreliability'. He was already resenting the indignity, the uncertainty, of having to adjust his wishes in the Balkans to Russia's interest there—to 'Russia's inclination', as he then defined it, 'to interfere in Balkan affairs'. On 8 January 1941, when the directive was three weeks old, but again without a trace of recognition for the irony of his words, he told Raeder that 'Stalin must be regarded as a cold-blooded blackmailer: he would, if it served his purpose, break any treaty at any time'; and he added that 'diplomatic preparation by England in Russia is already recognisable'. By March 1941, according to a statement by Halder after the war,¹ he was convinced that 'secret agreements already exist between Russia and England, and because of these England has rejected German peace offers . . . We must count on an attack by Russia as a certainty'. And if this evidence is not to be trusted, as being after the event, it is certain that in a speech to his Commanders-in-Chief on 15 June 1941 he 'explained that war with Russia is inevitable; otherwise Russia will overrun us later when we are tied down elsewhere . . .'.² Meanwhile, any objections to this view, on the evidence from Russia, were waved aside, according to Ribbentrop,³ with the remark that 'diplomats and attachés are the worst informed men in the world'.

One final touch was still required, however, and Hitler easily supplied it. If it was one mistake to over-estimate the danger of a Russian attack on Germany, it was another to under-estimate, however slightly, Russia's strength and the immensity of the effort

¹ *N.D. (C. and A.)*, Affidavit H.

² *N.D.*, 170-C, item 168.

³ *Proceedings*, Part 10, p. 250.

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that would be required for her defeat. It became his conviction, an article of faith, that she would be defeated in a matter of months. All would be over in the autumn of 1941 if he attacked in the early summer. His object, as he stated in the directive of 18 December, was 'to crush Soviet Russia in a quick campaign'. In February 1941 he laid it down that Mediterranean operations would not be launched until the autumn, when he expected that Russia would have collapsed. On 18 March 1941 he declared that he would force the issue in the Spanish question in the autumn, when 'Barbarossa' was completed. On 9 July, when the Eastern campaign had begun, he anticipated that 'a victorious campaign on the Eastern front will have a tremendous effect on the whole situation... in another one or two months'. On 14 July he stated in a directive that 'the military domination of Europe after the defeat of Russia' will allow the strength of the Army to be reduced in the near future'.¹ As late as 17 September 1941 it seemed that 'the end of September will bring the great decision in the Russian campaign'.

It is this over-confidence which has led many to believe that when Hitler undertook the Russian campaign he was 'flushed with success and intoxicated with propaganda'. But enough has already been said to show that the decision was taken by a disappointed and desperate man, as well as by an arrogant and overbearing Führer; that his over-confidence was but another measure of his desperation. He had revealed a similar mixture of over-confidence and desperation on the eve of the War.

III

Driven on by these arguments and his hopes of the outcome, Hitler's planning for the Eastern campaign proceeded without interruption, whatever hesitation he may have felt after issuing the 'Barbarossa' directive.

That directive, of 18 December 1940,² had indicated that the concentration of troops for the attack would be ordered eight

¹ *N.D.*, 74-C.

² *N.D.*, 446-PS.

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weeks before the intended beginning of the operation. It had added that 'preparations requiring more time to start are—if this has not yet been done—to begin at once and be completed by 15 May 1941'. On 20 January 1941 Hitler addressed the German and Italian Chiefs of Staff.¹ In his speech, while admitting the great danger from 'the gigantic *bloc* of Russia' and confessing that, in dealing with it, he preferred 'to rely on powerful means at my disposal' rather than on treaties, he carefully veiled his intention to attack. 'While Stalin lives,' he said, 'there is probably no danger, though it is necessary to keep a constant eye on the Russian factor, and to keep on guard by means of strength and clever diplomacy.' But plans for the economic exploitation of the Soviet Union, completed in great detail by the end of April,² were already under active preparation;³ and on 3 February, in more select company, with no Italians present, Hitler settled outstanding problems in connection with the operational plan.

This meeting⁴ was held to discuss the state of the Russian Armies, to review the German operational plans and to settle, in particular, the problem of co-ordinating the attack on Russia with Germany's other commitments: in the occupied territories, in North Africa and in connection with operation 'Marita' (the invasion of Greece). So far as 'Barbarossa' was concerned 'the Führer was on the whole in agreement with the operational plan', and he directed that the necessary concentration of forces should 'be camouflaged as a feint for "Sea Lion" and the subsidiary measure "Marita"'. This camouflage plan was specified in greater detail in the Naval War Diary, on 18 February.⁵

The deployment for 'Barbarossa' is to be made the greatest deception in history. Its camouflaged purpose is to be the last preparation for the invasion of England. . . . In spite of the far-reaching disintegration of operation 'Sea Lion' everything possible is to be done to maintain the impression among our own troops that the invasion against England is being further prepared. . . . Whether measures having to do with

¹ *N.D.*, 134-C. ² *N.D.*, 1317-PS; 447-PS; 1157-PS; 1017-PS, 865-PS.

³ *N.D.*, 2353-PS, pp. 368-373. ⁴ *N.D.*, 8, 1-PS. ⁵ *N.D.*, 33-C, p. 232.

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'Barbarossa'. . . can be made to coincide with operation 'Marita', for the purpose of further deception, is being investigated by the Army. . . .

In relation to other operations, though Hitler insisted on their importance—particularly, as will be seen, on the need for intervention in North Africa and on it remaining possible at all costs to occupy France (operation 'Attila') if necessary—it was already a basic assumption on 3 February that 'Barbarossa' should receive every priority. It was clear, too, that, among these other plans, the invasion of Greece ('Marita') was a necessary preliminary to the Eastern campaign, and that it would involve divisions which would also be needed for the attack on Russia. In other words, 'Marita', and 'Barbarossa' formed a single schedule, and the date of the latter necessarily hinged on the timely execution of the plans for Greece.

When, therefore, the revolt in Yugoslavia upset those plans, 'Barbarossa' had to be postponed. On 27 March, after discussing the Yugoslav *coup d'état* with the General Staff,¹ Hitler, who was shocked and angered by that development, decided to 'speed up the schedule of all preparations and to use such strong forces that the Yugoslav collapse will take place in the shortest possible time'; he also laid it down that, in consequence, the beginning of the attack on Russia would have to be postponed for about four weeks. At another conference on 30 April,² when Greece had been overrun, it was announced that he had fixed 22 June as the date for the opening of 'Barbarossa'.

Additional emphasis was then laid on the need for secrecy and deception. A directive of 12 May³ announced that

efforts must be aimed more and more at making the strategic concentration for 'Barbarossa' appear as a large-scale manoeuvre, also at continuing the preparations for the attack on England with special energy. . . . The nearer the day of the attack, the more intensive can be the methods employed for deception purposes. . . . The rumours of 'rear cover against Russia' and 'feint assembly of forces in the East'

¹ *N.D.*, 1746-PS, Part II.

² *N.D.*, 873-PS.

³ *N.D.*, 876-PS.

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must be circulated, and the troops on the Channel coast must believe in the preparations for 'Sea Lion'. . . . The operation against Crete¹ is to be utilised in the slogan: 'Crete was a general try-out for the landing in Britain'.

On 6 June a further announcement² was circulated which stated that the

second phase of deception is in operation with the aim of giving the impression that landings are being prepared from Norway, the Channel coast and Brittany, and that troop concentrations in the east are a deception exercise for the landing in England.

With this announcement was also circulated the final operational schedules for 'Barbarossa', with D-day on 22 June. On 9 June³ all Commanders of Army Groups and Armies, and Naval and Air Commanders of equal rank, were ordered to present Hitler with their last reports on the preparations on 14 June. On 22 June the attack began, according to plan.

IV

In the event, the attack on Russia produced precisely the effects he had hoped to forestall by making it. It forced Great Britain and Russia together; by engaging Russia and therefore freeing Japan in the Far East, it led to Pearl Harbour and the American entry into the War.

Not least among the reasons why these untoward developments were discounted or unforeseen by Hitler was the mistaken assumption that Russia could be defeated in three or four months. That it was mistaken was clearly one reason why his plan failed to have the effects he hoped for. Because it was proved wrong, the last remaining enemy on the Continent was not eliminated; Russia was able to collaborate with Great Britain; Great Britain was never brought to the point where she saw that there was no longer a chance of winning; America entered the War. But even

¹ German landings in Crete began on 20 May.

² *N.D.*, 39-C.

³ *N.D.*, 78-C.

if the assumption had been correct it is unlikely that the effects would have been what he wanted; and it is an error to believe that even Hitler made the assumption, and others that depended on it, unreservedly.

In fact, although he did not miscalculate by all that much in the matter of Russia's ability to resist, and might have proved completely right if he had attacked as the liberator instead of as the oppressor of the Russian people, he did recognise that the defeat of Russia might prove more difficult than he hoped and supposed. He did consider that, even if he were eminently successful in Russia, Great Britain might still refuse to surrender. And, 'regarding the Japanese interest in Singapore', he did feel, on 8 January 1941, that 'the Japanese must be given a free hand even if'—in spite of his hopes to the contrary—'this may entail the risk that the U.S.A. is thus forced to take drastic steps'. But it was still a strategic mistake to be over-confident to the extent that he was, and the reservations he made failed to deter him. The reason for this, the real evidence for his lack of vision and foresight, lies in the fact that the argument with which he qualified his over-confident calculations was as over-confident as the calculations themselves, and far more wildly wrong.

On 8 January 1941 he was 'firmly convinced', even supposing the Russian campaign was less successful than he hoped, even supposing it failed to induce Great Britain to surrender and the United States to stay out, that 'Europe's armament and economic resources offer far greater possibilities than the limited possibilities found in Britain and America'. If necessary, even if Russia proved difficult to conquer, Germany could wage war indefinitely against the British, provided she, and not Russia, took the initiative in the East. He was 'firmly convinced that the situation in Europe can no longer develop unfavourably for Germany even if we should lose the whole of North Africa. Our position in Europe is so firmly established that the outcome cannot possibly be to our disadvantage. The British can hope to win the War only by beating us on the Continent.... The Führer is convinced that this is impossible.'

On 20 January he told the Italians that he did 'not see a great danger from America, even if she did enter the war'.¹

These over-emphatic statements indicate, from one point of view, the extent to which, when his hopes were dashed, first of Great Britain's surrender after the defeat of France, then of a successful invasion of England, he became anxious for the future. They read suspiciously as if he was not so confident as he seemed. They pile up the evidence for the state of desperation to which he had been reduced before he decided on the Eastern campaign. Underlying them, however, there was also the genuine but dangerous assumption that seaborne assaults could not succeed against defended coasts. This illusory belief in the impregnability of Fortress Europe, a reflection of his underestimation of sea-power, had been reinforced by his experience with 'Sea Lion'; if Germany could not land in England, then the Allies could never land in the face of a German army. He accepted this so completely that on 25 July 1941, uncertain whether the Russian campaign would deter the U.S.A. from entering the War, he could 'reserve the right to take severe action against the United States as well' when Russia was defeated. It dominated his entire strategy in the second half of the War. It was important—at least as important as the calculation that Russia would quickly collapse—among the false premises on which he made and justified the Russian campaign.

Other miscalculations helped him to meet assumed necessity with a false appearance of wisdom, and to justify with baseless arguments what was really a desperate move. He under-estimated the enormous productive capacity of the United States. He miscalculated their reaction: instead of hoping that a successful campaign in Russia would keep them out of the war, he should have expected, if only on the analogy of Great Britain's guarantee to Poland in 1939 and her determined resistance through all the subsequent disasters of the first year of the war, that they would be at least as likely to come in as to stay out if things got blacker

¹ *N.D.*, 134-C.

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and Germany further extended her domination on the Continent.

These mistakes could never be rectified. The Eastern campaign, undertaken as a solution for his problems, only added to his burdens. Begun in order to increase the possibilities of manoeuvre, it destroyed the opportunities which still remained. The outcome of an unenviable temperament and of limited strategical powers, it was soon to be the cause of further emotional distortion and the end of all attempts at a strategical approach to the conduct of the War.

Their book is a very exciting
 I am a supporter of Hitler's policy
 to massacre the ~~Indians~~ ^{Indians}

CHAPTER VII

NORTH AFRICA, THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE BALKANS IN 1941

I

IN spite of the Russian decision, there could be no question of abandoning Italy. The British offensive in the Western Desert had already necessitated the reinforcement of the Italians in North Africa; it still remained imperative, if the attack on Russia was to proceed unhindered, to hold the southern front. This need, indeed, seemed greater than it was; for, even when their initial alarm subsided, both Hitler and the Naval Staff over-estimated the scale, if not the potential danger, of the British thrust.

Raeder exaggerated it partly in a last attempt to get Hitler to reverse his Russian decision, partly to underline the foresight of his earlier warnings.

The fears of the Naval Staff [he complained on 27 December 1940] regarding unfavourable developments in the Eastern Mediterranean have proved justified. The enemy has assumed the initiative at all points and is everywhere conducting successful offensive actions as a result of Italy's serious strategic blunders. The Naval Staff views developments in the Mediterranean with grave misgivings. . . . The threat to Egypt, and thus to Britain's position in the entire Mediterranean, Near East and African areas, has been eliminated at one stroke. . . . It is no longer possible to drive the British Fleet from the Mediterranean, as was continually demanded by the Naval Staff, who considered this step vital to the outcome of the War.

But urgent measures were still necessary to stop the rot.

Hitler had no grounds for disagreeing with Raeder, either about the dangers or about the need for action. He knew Italy's weakness, he feared her treachery: 'there is a complete lack of leadership in

Italy; the Royal House is pro-British'. But the uncertainty of the Italian position only made it more necessary for Germany to come to Italy's aid. He was already 'considering where German action would be most effective'. At their next meeting, on 8 and 9 January 1941, he was convinced that 'it is vital for the outcome of the War that Italy does not collapse'; he was 'determined to do all in his power to prevent Italy from losing North Africa'; he was 'firmly determined to give the Italians support'. On 11 January a new directive¹ announced that 'the situation in the Mediterranean, where England is using superior force against our Allies, renders German assistance necessary for strategical, political and psychological reasons'. 'It is essential' added the directive, 'to hold out in Tripolitania.' Accordingly, in addition to the Panzer division already ordered to North Africa, a specially formed anti-tank regiment was to be transferred as soon as possible, in an attempt to save Libya, and the 10th Fliegerkorps—originally sent south 'for a limited time'—was ordered to remain in Sicily, to harass the British Fleet and provide direct support in North Africa.

He had already explained, however, at the meeting on 8 and 9 January, that there were limits to what he could do for Italy in North Africa. Because of the 'well-known Italian mentality', he must not 'go too far in matters of leadership if the Italians are to be kept in line. We should not make demands; too great demands may cause Mussolini to change his attitude.' There was also the danger that the Italians would make demands in return; they 'might, for example, desire information about German operational plans. . . . The Führer does *not* wish to inform the Italians of our plans. . . .' In any case, the possibilities of actual German assistance were small. The new German reinforcements could not be transferred until the middle of February, and their transfer would take at least five weeks, because the Italians themselves badly needed the few unloading ports. The opportunities for close air support would be limited because the Italians were using most of the advanced airfields.

¹ *N.D.*, 448-PS.

HITLER'S STRATEGY IN NORTH AFRICA

Whatever the force of these arguments—and the difficulties were very real—it is interesting to see Hitler reciting and accepting them; and the truth is that there were limits, not only to what he could do, but to what he would undertake in the Mediterranean. The reinforcement of North Africa was planned as a purely defensive measure, to offset the threat from Britain in that area. It was not intended to lead up to a decisive, war-winning campaign of the sort for which he was always looking: this he had now decided to conduct in Russia. There was no hope, to his mind, that the Mediterranean could provide the opportunity for such a campaign; for the man who aimed at defeating Russia in less than six months, North Africa offered no chance for quick results. On 8 January he 'no longer considers it possible for either the Italians or ourselves to reopen the offensive against Alexandria and Egypt with any success. The Italians go so far as to believe that, at best, they can attempt defensive actions; even this appears doubtful to them!' This offensive might, of course, be possible later, if Libya could be held; 'but probably not before the winter of 1942'. And much would have happened, Russia would have been eliminated, by then.

Hitler developed these views on 3 February, at a meeting held to discuss the co-ordination of the Russian campaign with other operations, including the defence of North Africa.¹ 'When "Barbarossa" opens', he declared, 'the world will hold its breath and make no comment'; and he was so confident of the result of the Eastern campaign that he thought that 'the loss of North Africa could be withstood in the military sense'. He admitted, however, that it would 'have a strong psychological effect on Italy'. After the loss of North Africa, moreover, 'Great Britain could hold a pistol at Italy's head and force her . . . to make a peace. . . . This would be to our disadvantage, for, as we ourselves have only a weak base there through Southern France, British forces in the Mediterranean could not be tied down. The British would have the free use of a dozen divisions and could use them more dangerously, e.g. in Syria. We must make every effort to prevent this.'

¹ *N.D.*, 872-PS.

Therefore Italy must be given some, if only limited, support. The German Air Force must be employed and he would send a 'blocking unit', as already ordered on 11 January; he would also allow this to be increased by one armoured regiment, though another armoured division was 'out of the question'.

The rapidity of the British advance in North Africa, reaching Benghazi on 6 February, although it thus forced him slightly to increase the scale of the German reinforcements, served only to confirm him in his general attitude. On 15 February it was laid down that no full-scale operations would be attempted in the Mediterranean until the autumn of 1941, the estimated date for the victorious conclusion of the Russian campaign.

In view of this directive, the fact that Rommel opened his first offensive on 31 March 1941, and reached the Egyptian frontier by the middle of April, may seem inexplicable. But this action does not contradict, it only confirms, what has just been said of Hitler's attitude to operations in North Africa. Rommel's first attack surprised his own superiors as much as it surprised the British.¹ He had been ordered to prepare a plan only ten days before his advance began; his instructions had limited the plan to the reconquest of Cyrenaica. He had been ordered to submit it by 20 April, by which date he had completed the job, except for Tobruk, against instructions. Subsequent orders to Rommel confirm, moreover, that Hitler's interest in Cyrenaica was purely defensive. In May he was told that the possession of Cyrenaica, with or without Tobruk, Sollum and Bardia, was his primary task, and that a continuance of his advance into Egypt was of secondary importance. His subordinates might disagree with him, but Hitler was insisting on the ruling of 15 February.

II

This ruling applied, not only to North Africa, but to French Africa and the Western Mediterranean as well. Gibraltar was still to be taken; Malta was added to the list of objectives; France, in

¹ Desmond Young, *Rommel*, p. 93.

HITLER'S ATTITUDE IN THE W. MEDITERRANEAN

the interests of holding North-West Africa, was to be brought into line, and by force if necessary; the British were to be driven from the Mediterranean at all points. But all these plans were to be put into effect only when Russia had been defeated.

The capture of Gibraltar had not ceased to seem urgently desirable. The plan for its capture had not been cancelled, but only postponed. Raeder was still convinced that it must be taken. Its significance, he told Hitler on 27 December 1940,

is increased by recent developments. It would protect Italy; safeguard the Western Mediterranean; secure the supply lines to North Africa; close the British routes to Malta and Alexandria; restrict the freedom of the British Fleet; complicate the British offensive action in Cyrenaica and Greece; eliminate an important link in the British convoy system....

Hitler fully agreed that 'the strategic reasons for the speedy execution of the operation still hold good'; and on 20 January 1941 he told Mussolini that 'the blocking of the Sicily passage by air is only a poor substitute for the possession of Gibraltar'.¹

Unfortunately, in the new circumstances, its capture would require a greater diversion of resources than he was prepared to approve. 'Franco is not ready'; and another attempt to influence Franco, made in the first few days of the new year, failed to change his mind.

There is [Hitler declared on 8 January 1941] for the time being, no prospect of Spain's becoming our ally. She is not willing to do so. This was made perfectly clear by Franco's remark that he will not take part in the war until Britain is on the point of collapse. The Führer has offered Franco a million tons of grain; despite this offer, Franco did not feel he could acquiesce in the Führer's plans.

Until Franco could be brought to collaborate, the capture of Gibraltar would require nothing less than an invasion of Spain. But the diversion of troops now ordered for North Africa and for the attack on Greece was already all that Germany could afford, in view of the preparations for the invasion of Russia. On account of these movements, said the Commander-in-Chief of the Army on

¹ *N.D.*, 134-C.

8 January, preparations for the attack on Gibraltar, as well as for 'Sea Lion', would have to be held up for a time. This was a state of affairs which Hitler was quick to confirm. On 3 February it was reported that 'Felix' is now no longer possible as the main part of the artillery is being entrained',¹ and because the troops held in reserve for it were needed for 'Marita' and 'Barbarossa'.²

The attack on Gibraltar, however, remained a plan, something to be set in motion if the Spanish attitude should change or after the defeat of Russia. On 6 February Hitler made another fruitless effort to change the Spanish attitude in another letter to Franco.³ On 18 March Spain's refusal to co-operate still 'complicates matters', and Hitler realised that the greater the delay, the more difficult it would become to capture Gibraltar on account of British counter-measures. But he was still determined 'to force a decision in the Spanish question in the autumn', after the defeat of Russia. On 22 May he approved Raeder's suggestion that Spain should be encouraged and helped to reinforce the defences of the Canary Islands. On the same date, despite Raeder's continued objection, he was 'still in favour of occupying the Azores, the opportunity for which may arrive by autumn', not only because of their importance in the scheme for seizing Gibraltar, but because their occupation would enable Germany to operate long-range bombers against the U.S.A. On 22 August, although it was recognised that co-operation with Spain was still a necessary condition for the attack, Raeder again argued that the occupation of Gibraltar was of decisive importance, and Hitler still 'fully appreciated' that that was so. On 13 November, although he admitted that 'at present such action is hardly likely', Hitler still thought that he would like to use the German battle-cruisers—then in Brest—for an operation against the Azores, 'should this become necessary'.

If the seizure of Gibraltar and the Atlantic islands thus remained in the planning stage, becoming, however, with the passage of

¹ *N.D.*, 872-PS.

² *N.D.* 33-C, p. 17.

³ See *The Spanish Government and the Axis*, Documents No. 12 and 13 for Hitler's letter and Franco's non-committal reply.

time, a vague ambition rather than a fixed intention, the capture of other objectives in the Western Mediterranean, first discussed in 1941, never got so far. It never got beyond the discussion stage. The need to subdue Malta by air was discussed on 3 February 1941;¹ the capture of Malta was mentioned in the directive of 15 February, which announced that it would not be attempted until Russia was defeated. This was confirmed on 23 February, when the Naval Staff were informed by O.K.W.² that the seizure of Malta was contemplated for the autumn of 1941, after the completion of the attack on Russia. Raeder was not content with this. He asked the Air Force whether it was not possible to use airborne troops against Malta before the beginning of the Eastern campaign;³ and on 18 March he impressed on Hitler that 'it was particularly important to take Malta', quoting the German Air Force for the opinion that it could be taken by airborne troops. But he was effectively suppressed. Hitler replied that 'the more recent reports of the Commander-in-Chief Air reveal that the difficulties are greater than expected, as the terrain is badly cut up by small walls, making it very difficult for airborne troops to function'. Investigations were to continue; but the subject was not again discussed at the highest level till March 1942.

Raeder had also discussed with the Italians the occupation of Corsica, and he outlined the discussions to Hitler on this occasion; but no conclusions were reached and this subject was never raised again after 18 March 1941.

In spite of his refusal to consider operations in the Mediterranean, Hitler, so long as he remained alarmed by the British Western Desert offensive and the possible effect it would have in France, was determined, as Raeder put it on 8 January, that 'if France becomes troublesome, she will have to be crushed completely. Under no circumstances must the French Fleet be allowed to get

¹ *N.D.*, 872-PS.

² *N.D.*, 170-C, item 22.

³ *N.D.*, 33-C. Raeder was being pressed by the Chief of Naval Operations, who insisted on 'the occupation of Malta even before "Barbarossa"' on 18 February (see *N.D.*, 170-C, item 121.)

away.' The emergency operation 'Attila', including the seizure of Toulon by airborne troops, was accordingly kept in readiness. On 3 February he insisted that 'it must at all costs remain possible to carry out "Attila" during the execution of "Marita" and "Barbarossa"'.¹ Even when his alarm subsided, and even when Raeder began to point out, from 4 February onwards, that the operation was most unlikely to succeed in holding or destroying the French Fleet should the emergency arise, he would permit, in the middle of February, only a relaxation of the state of readiness and not the cancellation of the plan. As late as 20 April, when Raeder asked if it was necessary to keep operation 'Attila' in hand, he replied that it 'must be kept in readiness for the present, even though I am inclined to believe that Admiral Darlan's attitude is trustworthy'.

As the possibility of French 'desertion' declined, Raeder, more anxious than ever about the threat to North-West Africa since the decision to direct German resources to the attack on Russia, and fearing that 'Attila' would in any case fail in its purpose of holding the French Fleet if the emergency occurred, pressed for a renewed attempt at collaboration with the Vichy Government. Beginning on 18 March, he argued that negotiations should be resumed and that German military and air forces—as well as U-boats—should be based in French North-West Africa. His arguments were not new: the main need was to forestall an Anglo-American landing in that area; that was the danger which must be guarded against at all costs. But whereas Hitler, despite the overriding priority given to the attack on Russia, was determined to occupy France and seize the French Fleet if Vichy 'deserted', he was not prepared to divert any resources to France and North-West Africa unless he had to. The danger of British or American intervention in North-West Africa was one which, under Raeder's pressure, he admitted to be very real; but it was not immediate.

It may be doubted whether much could have been done if Hitler had tried. Collaboration with Vichy would have been as difficult

¹ *N.D.*, 872-PS.

and uncertain as collaboration with Franco. The French would have driven a hard bargain; it would have conflicted with Germany's promises to Italy, who would in any case have opposed the re-equipment of the French Fleet and colonial forces; Hitler himself shared Italy's distrust of France; and Germany was already committed too heavily elsewhere to have been able to spare many resources, either for an attack on North-West Africa or for its defence with the participation of the French. In the event, he did not try. On 18 March it was stated that 'the French problem would be clarified after the completion of "Barbarossa"'. On 9 July Raeder once more pointed out how important it was that France should keep a firm hold on French Africa.

If the U.S.A. or Britain were to gain possession of Dakar, it would be a severe threat to our ability to carry on the war in the Atlantic; the position of the Axis forces in North Africa would be severely menaced... The Commander-in-Chief once again emphasises the decisive strategic significance of keeping a firm hold on North Africa in view of probable plans of the U.S.A. and Britain to drive the French out of that area.

Hitler's only reply was that he was 'very distrustful of France and thinks her counter-demands excessive'. On 25 July he enlarged on this: 'France's attitude towards us has changed since the withdrawal of our Panzer divisions to the East. Her political demands have been increasing since that time. I will probably move two Panzer divisions to the West in the near future. Then France will become more amenable.' In any case, he went on, he would 'under no circumstances prejudice our relations with Italy by making concessions to France'.

His attitude implied that the Anglo-American danger to North-West Africa, however real, was one against which little could or would be done in advance; he would wait until it arose. 'As soon as the U.S.A. occupies Spanish or Portuguese islands', he added on 25 July, 'I will march into Spain; I will send Panzer and infantry divisions to North Africa from there, in order to defend North Africa.' He apparently overlooked the fact that, while it would have been necessary for Germany to seize the Atlantic islands

before attacking Gibraltar, it would not be necessary for the United States and Great Britain to do so before landing in North Africa.

For a time, Raeder kept up his campaign for closer relations with Vichy. Much could be accomplished by stages, he argued on 22 August; 'first of all the question of transport shipping, to be provided by France, can be solved; then West Africa can be secured, and finally there can be unlimited co-operation'—co-operation which, in his view, was vital for the Battle of the Atlantic as well as for the defence of North Africa. But his efforts were fruitless. It is true that, from May onwards, operation 'Attila' was gradually forgotten in an atmosphere of closer collaboration with Admiral Darlan, who had become Vice-President of the Vichy Government in February 1941. In May there were discussions with Darlan about French assistance to Germany from Syria, and facilities to be supplied by France for Axis supplies to North Africa.¹ By August the Vichy Government had begun to sell and charter ships to Germany for use in supplying North Africa, and negotiations were in progress for the use of Bizerta by the Germans. These were reported on at the naval conference on 22 August. By 12 December Darlan had got as far as offering Germany an exchange of intelligence about naval movements. He had also expressed a wish to talk with Raeder. Hitler approved Raeder's visit to France, which took place at the end of January 1942. But, despite these negotiations, collaboration did not proceed very far, and the problem of what to do in defence of North-West Africa, like the plans for the capture of Gibraltar, the Atlantic islands and Malta, hung fire throughout 1941.

III

The German advance through the Balkans to Greece was intended by Hitler, in its relation to the Mediterranean theatre, to be a defensive move; but it was also an indispensable preliminary to the Russian campaign. It would seal off the Balkans, and especially,

¹ *N.D.*, 1866-PS of 13 May 1941.

the Roumanian oil, from Russia and from the British in the Eastern Mediterranean; it would facilitate the massing of German troops for the offensive against Russia; it would effectively prevent Great Britain and Russia from joining forces in that area when Germany turned east. For these reasons it was more important to him than operations in the Mediterranean proper; and nothing was allowed to stand in its way.

The directive of 11 January 1941¹ stated that it was essential to 'remove the danger of an Italian collapse on the Albanian front'; the transfer of two and a half divisions to Albania via Italy was given priority, where shipping was concerned, over the reinforcement of North Africa.² In the subsequent preparations for the main Balkan operation, including the occupation of Bulgaria at the end of February, it was given priority over North Africa and operation 'Felix', and Hitler was in no way deterred by the knowledge that Russia would be alarmed in advance by the German penetration of the Balkans. When Yugoslavia, the main danger to the Italians in Albania, revolted against alliance with Germany on 27 March, he at once announced that she 'must be considered an enemy and therefore crushed as speedily as possible'.³ When Greece was overrun, although so recently deterred by the difficulties of seizing Malta, he at once ordered the capture of Crete.

In spite of the delay that resulted from the Yugoslav revolt, the Greek operation met with total success. On 6 April German troops marched into Yugoslavia and Greece. Greek resistance was over by 21 April; the British evacuation began on 22 April; the Germans entered Athens on 27 April. The airborne invasion of Crete began on 20 May; by 27 May, when the British evacuation began, it was virtually complete.

Hitler's successes in Greece and Crete followed closely on a complete reversal of the situation in North Africa, where Rommel had begun at the end of March the offensive which carried him to

¹ *N.D.*, 448-PS.

² This transfer was later cancelled because the Italians did not regard it as essential; *N.D.*, 134-C.

³ *N.D.*, 1746-PS.

the Egyptian frontier by the middle of April. They were accompanied by serious British warship losses, losses which became insupportable during the battle for Crete, and by disorders in Iraq. In every respect the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean had altered radically in Germany's favour between the beginning of April and the end of May. If Hitler's object in overrunning Greece and seizing Crete had been to drive Great Britain from that area, this would have been the moment for a further effort.

Raeder had all along regarded the advance into Greece as likely to provide an opportunity to secure the control of the Eastern Mediterranean, which he had so often advocated. On 4 February 1941 he recognised that 'the British Fleet would still be able to maintain naval supremacy for a time' after the German occupation of Greece. But on 18 March he asked for, and received, Hitler's confirmation that Germany would not stop short of the total occupation of Greece, even if the Greeks sought a settlement as soon as German troops began the invasion; and, although Hitler seems to have required no prompting from Raeder in deciding to take Crete,¹ the Naval Staff clearly hoped that he would go further into the Middle East once Crete had been occupied. On 30 May Raeder demanded 'a decisive Egypt-Suez offensive for the autumn of 1941', a step which, according to the Naval Staff, would be 'more deadly to the British Empire than the capture of London',² and for which Rommel also pressed a few weeks later.³ On 6 June he presented Hitler with a memorandum from the Naval Staff on the same subject.

This memorandum, which the Naval Staff regarded as 'one of the most important documents in all the war records',⁴ contained 'observations on the strategic situation in the Eastern Mediterranean

¹ This operation was arranged between Hitler and the Air Force. Goering was in charge of it. (See *N.D. [C. and A.]*, Supplement B, p. 1108.) Raeder's first reference to Crete in his meetings with Hitler was not until 22 May, when the invasion had already begun.

² *N.D.*, 170-C, item 164.

³ Rommel first proposed an offensive against Suez, as the first step to Basra and the Persian Gulf, on 27 July. See Desmond Young, *Rommel*, pp. 83-4.

⁴ *N.D.*, 170-C, item 168.

after the Balkan campaign and the occupation of Crete'. It pointed out 'the decisive objectives of the war in the Near East, which have moved into grasping distance as a result of our success in the Aegean'. It emphasised that 'the offensive exploitation of the present favourable situation must take place with the greatest speed and energy, before Great Britain recovers in the Near East with American aid'. It recognised that the opening of the Eastern campaign in the near future was an 'unalterable fact'; but it demanded that '“Barbarossa”, which . . . naturally stands in the foreground of operational plans . . . , must under no circumstances lead to the abandonment or reduction of plans, or to delay, in the conduct of the war in the Eastern Mediterranean'.

The opportunity was, indeed, so obvious that, although the necessary preparations—for supplying and reinforcing Rommel, for crossing into Turkey, Syria and Iraq—had not been made, even Hitler might have been tempted to change his plans. But he was no more diverted by opportunity in the Middle East than by danger in North-West Africa. So far as the Mediterranean and Middle East were concerned, his Balkan advance had been purely defensive. Greece had been taken primarily to defend the Roumanian oil, Crete primarily to defend Greece.¹ Rommel had found unexpected possibilities in North Africa, but Hitler did not trust them. Long before these advances were launched, he had announced on 15 February, that operations in the Mediterranean would not take place until after the defeat of Russia. Whatever Raeder thought or Rommel might do, it was not Hitler's intention to exclude Great Britain as soon as possible from those areas; and he was not tempted to change his plans when the Balkan advance, in conjunction with Rommel's, produced a deterioration in the British position which was as serious as it was unexpected.

¹ Goering admitted that Crete was expected to be useful against British traffic to Suez, but emphasised that 'at that time everything was being prepared for the invasion of Russia and nobody thought of going into Africa. . . Crete would have been a possible base for the English against our positions in the Balkans, and could prevent a possible connection between. . . the Russian and British Fleets'. (See *N.D. [C. and A.]*, Supplement B, p. 1108.)

On the contrary, Rommel's instructions were purely defensive, as has already been noted,¹ and, at the same time, Hitler had issued a directive—Raeder protested against it and got it reversed on 22 May—to the effect that the defence of the whole Greek coastal area, as far as Salonika and including Lemnos, the Piraeus and possibly Crete, should be handed over to Italy as soon as Crete was captured. His only interest was the defence of these newly acquired areas; and even then the coast could be left to the Italians. On 25 May, during the battle for Crete, he issued another directive on the occasion of the rebellion in Iraq; and this emphatically subordinated operations in the Middle East to the attack on Russia. 'The Arabian Freedom Movement', he declared, 'is our natural ally against England in the Middle East. In this connection, the rebellion in Iraq assumes a special significance. I have therefore decided to encourage developments in the Middle East by supporting Iraq.' A military mission would be sent; arms and aircraft would be supplied; propaganda would be spread; revolt fanned; information collected. But, beyond that, in strict conformity with earlier rulings, nothing would be done. 'Whether—and if so by what means—it would be possible afterwards to launch an offensive against Suez, and eventually oust the British finally from their position between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, cannot be decided until operation 'Barbarossa' is complete.'

The efforts of the Naval Staff in the next two weeks had no effect on Hitler's opinion. At the end of June a series of further orders and directives, in connection with the launching of the attack on Russia, recapitulated his earlier decision. Three separate operations were contemplated in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. There would be an attack from Libya against Egypt; an advance from Bulgaria through Turkey to Suez; a third offensive against Iraq from positions to be won in the Transcaucasus. But none of these plans would be put in motion until Russia was defeated.

¹ See above, p. 146.

IV

At the same time, in June, a further small reinforcement was permitted for the Afrika Korps and the German Air Force in the Mediterranean. But the supply position in North Africa, already difficult, was soon to become desperate. 73 per cent of German-controlled shipping on the routes to Africa, according to Raeder's report on 22 August, had been sunk by the end of July; and Italian losses were only less in proportion because they were reluctant to sail their ships. Malta came into its own, emphasising the importance of Hitler's omission to capture it, and all attempts by air attack to wreck it as a base were successfully resisted. Finally, in desperation, Hitler, who could spare no more tanks, troops or aircraft, was forced to order U-boats to the Mediterranean.

The transfer of U-boats was an inadequate answer to the problem of Axis shipping losses; but, the Russian campaign having begun on 22 June, it was the only action which Hitler could take which had even the appearance of relieving the situation. It had first been discussed on 20 April, when Raeder dismissed the idea on the grounds that the main objective of U-boat warfare was the attack on the United Kingdom. Hitler was then in complete agreement with Raeder's views. But it was he who next raised the subject on 25 July, when, once again, he accepted Raeder's view that it would be wrong to handicap operations in the Atlantic. On 22 August, however, when the supply position in the Mediterranean had gone from bad to worse, he raised the matter again, listened to Raeder's arguments—'all available U-boats must be concentrated in the Atlantic . . . U-boats should only be transferred to other theatres in cases of great emergency . . . no U-boats should be transferred from the Atlantic until there are forty in position there . . .'—and then, overriding him, proposed that six U-boats should be diverted.

Raeder won a breathing-space by asking that the provision of a suitable base should first be discussed with Mussolini; he hoped

and believed that Mussolini would not agree to the transfer. But on 17 September two U-boats were en route to the Mediterranean and the other four were due to leave before the end of the month. Raeder's remarks at the meeting of that date imply, indeed, that Mussolini's objections were, like his own, ignored.

As the Führer knows, our North African supply shipments have suffered additional heavy losses. . . . Evidently the appeal for help made by the German General attached to the Italian Armed Forces was responsible for the order of the Führer to concentrate our own forces on escorting supply shipments, to dispatch immediately six U-boats without taking Italian operations into consideration, and to speed up the transfer of mine-sweepers and motor boats.

The Mediterranean situation continued to get worse. By 13 November, in Raeder's view, it had reached 'the critical stage, as feared by the Naval Staff since July'.

It is pointed out that the Naval Staff has always recognised the dangerous situation caused by British naval supremacy in the Mediterranean, and has constantly urged the speedy introduction of the proper German measures. To-day the enemy has complete naval and air supremacy; he is operating totally undisturbed in all parts of the Mediterranean. Malta is being constantly reinforced. The Italians are not able to bring about any major improvements. . . . The transport situation in the Aegean has also greatly deteriorated. Enemy submarines definitely have the upper hand. . . .

And these conclusions were justified by the rate of shipping losses. The monthly total of Axis shipping available for North African convoys had been reduced from 163,000 tons in September to 37,000 tons in November, and of that 37,000 tons 77 per cent was sunk during the month.¹

Hitler's only reaction was to send more U-boats; he could spare nothing else. By 12 December no less than 36 U-boats were either in or en route for the Mediterranean. This represented exactly a half of the number of U-boats at sea in all areas, and no less than a quarter of the total operational boats available; and it

¹ See the statement by the Flag Officer, German Naval Command, Italy, summarised in *The Daily Telegraph* for 26 February 1947.

was proposed to increase the number to 50. Although the rate of increase in the total number of U-boats coming available was now improving fast, this diversion was undoubtedly an important factor in the relief which Great Britain obtained in the Atlantic in the last three months of 1941.

Hitler's reasons for overruling Raeder on 22 August were that 'the British will probably undertake an attack on Sollum and Tobruk to relieve the Russians; the surrender of North Africa would mean a great loss both to us and to the Italians . . . ; it is very desirable to relieve the Afrika Korps with a few U-boats'. But his action was too little and too late. Only four U-boats had passed the Straits of Gibraltar by 18 November, when the 8th Army opened the second Western Desert offensive in Libya; and it would have needed other measures than the transfer of U-boats to the Mediterranean to prevent that offensive or rob it of success.

The rate of the British advance—reaching Benghazi on 29 November—soon forced Hitler, less complacent now than he had been in the previous January about the loss of North Africa, to adopt more drastic measures and to make his first serious effort at collaboration with Italy. On 2 December 1941, having already robbed the Atlantic of U-boats, he announced the transfer of German Air Force units from the Russian front for the defence of this once subordinate theatre, and revealed that he had, at last, held serious discussions with Mussolini.

As a foundation for defending and securing our own position in the Mediterranean [declared his directive of that date] and for the creation of a focus of Axis power in the Central Mediterranean, I have come to an agreement with the Duce, and command that sections of the Luftwaffe now released from the Eastern front, to the strength of one Fliegerkorps, and the necessary air defence bases, be transferred to the South Italian and North African area. Apart from its immediate effect on the conduct of the war in the Mediterranean and North Africa, this measure is designed to exert a considerable influence on all further development in the Mediterranean area. I put Field Marshal Kesselring in command of all the forces to be used, as C.-in-C. Southern area. The C.-in-C. Southern area will be subordinate to the Duce, from whom he

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will receive instructions via the Italian Supreme Command. His tasks are to achieve air and sea mastery in the area between Southern Italy and North Africa, thus ensuring safe lines of communication, the suppression of Malta being particularly important in this connection; to co-operate with German and Italian forces in North Africa; to paralyse enemy traffic through the Mediterranean and stop British supplies reaching Tobruk and Malta. . . .

But the Mediterranean was still regarded as an Italian theatre in which German interests were indirect. German officers were still excluded from Italian war rooms, and Italians from the German war rooms. Kesselring was still subordinate to the Duce. No direct German Command for the Mediterranean was established till 1943. And there was never an Italo-German Supreme Command.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC IN 1941

I

HITLER did not hesitate to give priority to the Russian campaign over the Mediterranean throughout 1941; he insisted, in the second half of 1941, that U-boats should be transferred from the Atlantic in an effort to save North Africa. If that were the only evidence available it would still be safe to conclude that the Battle of the Atlantic suffered even more than the war in the Mediterranean from the Russian decision. But the evidence is stronger and fuller than that. The loss to the Mediterranean, by December 1941, of thirty U-boats—a half of the number that could then be kept at sea at a time, a quarter of the total operational force available—was but a fraction of the damage done to Germany's effort against the British trade routes in the previous twelve months as a result of the decision to turn on Russia.

It is true that Hitler began to show a greater understanding of, and more sympathy with, Raeder's arguments in favour of the U-boat campaign. The directive of 12 November 1940, though professing to be a comprehensive statement of German plans, had omitted all reference to the war against British trade routes; the 'Barbarossa' directive of 18 December 1940, on the other hand, was careful to state that 'the main employment of the Navy remains, even during the Eastern campaign, clearly directed against England.'¹ And if that statement was little more than a gesture to console his naval critics, he soon showed himself anxious to make others. On 27 December 1940 he agreed that the existing building output of twelve to eighteen U-boats a month was not enough; he

¹ For the directive of 12 November 1940, see *N.D.*, 444-PS; for the directive of 18 December 1940, *N.D.*, 446-PS.

'wishes the greatest possible progress in U-boat construction'. On 8 January 1941 he 'explains' to Raeder—who had been explaining the same arguments for so long—that, 'regarding our warfare against Britain, all attacks must be concentrated on supplies and on the armament industry. . . . The supplies and the ships bringing them must be destroyed'. On 6 February he issued a directive—the first on the subject—entitled *Basic Principles for the Prosecution of the War against British War Economy*; and in it he more or less admitted his previous neglect of the battle on the trade routes.

Contrary to all our previous conceptions [it read] the strongest blow to the British war economy has been the high figure of losses in merchant ships, as a result of the sea and air war. This effect has been further intensified by the destruction of port installations. . . and by the limitations imposed on the use of ships by the necessity of travelling in convoy. . . . A further considerable increase can be expected when our U-boat operations are intensified during the course of this year. . . . The object of our future war efforts must be to concentrate every means of waging war by sea and air on enemy supplies. . . .

At the same time, even his tendency to false confidence, to exaggerated hopes, spread to this field, so long neglected, of the Battle of the Atlantic. 'Combined assaults on imports by the Air Force and Navy', he declared on 8 January 1941, 'might lead to victory as early as July or August.' The attack on British imports, he concluded in the directive of 6 February, 'may lead before long to the collapse of British resistance'.

But this increased interest in the Battle of the Atlantic was more than cancelled out by the unavoidable effects of the Russian decision of December 1940; and only one thing—his neglect of the U-boat campaign in the first sixteen months of the War—was more important than this for the ruin of these hopes. Raeder foresaw that this would be the case, and this fear had been the chief ground of his opposition to operation 'Barbarossa'. 'It is absolutely necessary to recognise'—so ran his last-ditch argument against 'Barbarossa' on 27 December 1940—'that the greatest task of the hour is the concentration of all our power against Britain. . . . All

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demands not absolutely necessary for the defeat of Britain must be deliberately set aside. There are serious doubts as to the advisability of operation "Barbarossa" before the overthrow of Britain. . . . In particular, there is the greatest need to concentrate on the British supply lines. . . . What is being done for U-boat and naval-air construction is much too little. . . . Britain's ability to maintain her supply lines is definitely the decisive factor for the outcome of the war.' For this effort, 'the Naval Staff is firmly convinced that U-boats, as in the World War, are the decisive weapons'. Because of the previous neglect, the maximum monthly output of U-boats had reached only the figures of between 12 to 18; 'it must be increased from 20 to 30, as was the case in the World War'. This was 'one of the most urgent demands submitted by the Naval Staff to the Armed Forces and the Government'; if it was not granted, 'all hope for the decisive effect of this important weapon against Britain will have to be relinquished'.

This demand, as Raeder most clearly implied, was incompatible with the decision to attack Russia, and to begin immediate preparations for the attack; and that Hitler also recognised this fact is clear from his answer to Raeder's outburst. Because, he replied, it was necessary to eliminate the last remaining enemy on the Continent, 'the Army must be made sufficiently strong; after that, everything can be concentrated on the needs of the Air Force and Navy'. Raeder retorted, with perfect truth, that 'the situation was the same in July 1940; but, after the Army had reduced its demands for a short time, it took them up again with even greater insistence'. But Hitler would not change his decision; he contented himself with 'attributing this [the decision to turn on Russia] to the new political situation'; and when Raeder pursued his point—'the fundamental error lies in the fact that workers are assigned who are not actually available; all decrees concerning priority grades etc. can bring no real improvement'—he merely suggested, with astonishing irrelevance and irresponsibility and a total lack of grip on man-power and priority problems, that 'perhaps additional pay would make such jobs more attractive'.

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This had been Hitler's attitude to U-boat construction throughout the sixteen months since the War had begun. The effect had been to cancel out his occasional earlier approvals of Raeder's demands for increased priority for U-boat building; and these had been too rare in any case: there was one at the outbreak of war and a second in July 1940. When considering the U-boat war in 1941 it is important to distinguish between the effects of this earlier neglect and the effects of the Russian decision itself. The building, and more particularly the working-up, of U-boats is a protracted business, with the result that Germany's shortage of operational U-boats, certainly in the first nine months of 1941, was due, not to the Russian decision, but to the neglect of the U-boat programme in 1940. On the other hand, the continued shortage of labour for U-boat building in 1941, the fact that the construction programme failed to swell to adequate proportions in that year, these were the results of the Russian decision and had their effect, operationally, after September 1941. There was no lack of complaints from Raeder under both these heads.

Up to February 1941, as a result of limits on earlier building, he found it impossible to keep more than about 6 U-boats at sea at a time. 'The scanty U-boat successes,' he reported on 4 February, 'are due first to the few boats in operation and second to the hampering effects of the weather. . . . U-boat warfare is for the time being not in a position to cut off imports effectively because of the small number of U-boats available.' But a year and a half of U-boat building, however limited, was bound to have an effect in due course, especially as the rate of construction had at last reached 12 to 18 a month while the number of U-boats sunk did not reach 7 a month until March 1941. The effect was noticeable from the Spring of 1941. The total of operational U-boats gradually increased, to 37 in May, 39 in June, 45 in July, 52 in August, and 120 by the end of 1941. In March the number of U-boats at sea exceeded 10 for the first time and this number increased to 15 in April, to 18 in May, to 60 by the end of the year. They used new tactics, operating in packs; they moved further west in the

North Atlantic and further south to the Freetown area, beyond the range of British defences; British losses mounted alarmingly, 200 ships being sunk by U-boats in the four months from March to June. The Battle of the Atlantic had at last begun in earnest.

But it was the British defences which had forced the U-boats to move to more distant areas and to adopt new tactics; these had also had eighteen months in which to improve; and their improvement had kept pace with the increased number of U-boats. 'In order to be as successful as last year', Raeder reported on 17 September 1941, 'three to four times as many U-boats are needed in view of the heavily escorted convoys.' The battle was still evenly matched; the number of U-boats was still not great enough for their work to be decisive. On the contrary, the last three months of 1941 were a lean time for the U-boats. And this was not merely because of the diversion of some of them to the Mediterranean, and not simply because it was a period of very bad weather in the North Atlantic: U-boat construction, as Raeder had foreseen, was no longer keeping pace with the improvement in British trade defences.

If it could not have been decisive in bringing about a German victory over Great Britain before the United States entered the War at the end of the year—probably nothing less than total priority for the U-boat campaign from the outbreak of war could have had this result—a greater concentration on U-boat building in the previous nine months could have prevented this deterioration in the last quarter of 1941. This policy would have made the year 1942, in which the Battle of the Atlantic reached its peak and in which over 300 U-boats were built, even more serious than it proved to be for Great Britain's survival; though, countered as it was by the American entry, the U-boat campaign might still have failed to be decisive. But such a programme, which Hitler's strategy made impossible in 1940, when it would have been most effective, was again postponed throughout 1941, first by preparations for the attack on Russia, then by the attack itself.

On 4 February 1941 Raeder was forced to complain once again

about the Navy's 'enormous shortage of skilled workers'. On 18 March he reported that, as a result of the man-power situation and the shortage of materials, the monthly output of U-boats would remain at 18 for the second quarter of the year and would drop to 15 thereafter. On 25 July he conceded that the programme had slightly exceeded his expectations, production having been pushed up to 21 a month; but it was still the case that it would drop again to 14 by the end of 1941, as a result of the desperate shortage of man-power; and it was still the case that even 21 U-boats a month was not enough. Even at this rate of production, he calculated that it would take till July 1943 to raise the number of operational U-boats to 300—the figure which, at the beginning of the War, Doenitz had regarded as the minimum for success.

Raeder's arguments were all to no purpose. The effects of Hitler's policy in the first sixteen months could not be undone; it was too late to persuade Hitler to change his mind about the attack on Russia. On 18 March his reply to Raeder was to repeat that 'he intends to concentrate the greater efforts on enlarging the Air Force and the Navy after "Barbarossa" had been completed'. On 25 July he protested that 'there is absolutely no reason for the concern of the Commander-in-Chief that I have changed my view as to the great importance of the blockade against Britain by U-boat and the Air Force; my original view has undergone no change whatever'. But his policy remained the same, so much so that Raeder temporarily gave up the struggle. 'It is', he said on 25 July, 'impossible to make up for lost time now'; all that could be done was to ensure that the Navy should receive the required priority when the Eastern campaign was over. Hitler gave him this assurance; he issued on the same day a directive¹ which said, once again, that 'the military domination of Europe after the defeat of Russia will enable the Army to be considerably reduced in the near future', to the advantage of the Navy and Air Force; and there were no further complaints from Raeder for the rest of the year.

¹ *N.D.*, 174-C.

II

Hitler's reassurance and Raeder's subsequent silence applied not only to the U-boat programme but also to the co-operation of the Air Force with the Navy in the Battle of the Atlantic. It is obvious, if only from Hitler's repeated promise to concentrate, when Russia was defeated, on Air Force as well as on naval programmes, that the decision to turn on Russia had the effect of reducing, immediately and for many months, the number of aircraft available for the battle against British imports. Next to its effect on U-boat building, this was the most serious result of the Russian decision for the Battle of the Atlantic. But Raeder's complaint against the German Air Force, ever since the beginning of the War, had been not so much concerned with the lack of aircraft as with the misuse of the aircraft available; and it was chiefly of bad relations between the German Air Force and the German Navy, though they were made worse by the weakening of the air forces available for operations in the West, that Raeder continued to complain in 1941. Hitler, who was not prepared to stop the drain away to the east, was as ineffective in dealing with the inter-Service problems as he had been in the previous controversies.

On 4 February Raeder argued that 'U-boats alone are not for the time being in a position to cut off imports effectively.... Hence the Air Force must attempt to hit Great Britain where it hurts most, by attacking her imports.... Systematically planned attacks must be made on supply lines, docks, ships and harbours... lasting damage must be inflicted on naval bases, especially shipyards.' British escort construction was beginning to have an unfavourable effect on the U-boats. 'The elimination of enemy shipyards is not merely of importance for naval warfare, it is absolutely vital for the prosecution of the War as a whole.' 'Ships afloat must be the target of the U-boats, ships in harbour and shipyards must be the target of the Air Force.' The Air Force had

been concentrating on enemy armament manufacturing centres, but with disappointing results. 'The problem of imports, on the other hand, and this means shipping space, is Britain's most vulnerable spot. Naval and merchant vessels must become the main targets for attack.' To the extent that the Air Force had already pursued this policy, it had achieved very little. 'Despite the laying of large numbers of mines, the volume of supplies entering London has not noticeably declined; so far we have not succeeded in seriously damaging British ports of import.' U-boats and aircraft, working together, were still 'capable of exerting a decisive influence'; but, if this was to be achieved, closer co-operation was essential in well-directed operations.

Hitler was 'of precisely the same opinion', but, as on earlier occasions when this subject had been discussed, he was not prepared to translate his agreement into action. Raeder went on to suggest, as one way of improving the existing state of collaboration between the Navy and the Air Force, that the Navy should take over control of the coastal air forces. This was an old idea; Raeder had raised it, Hitler had rejected it, before. It was now shelved again, with Hitler telling Raeder that Goering would 'greatly resent it'.

Until he accepted temporary defeat on 25 July, Raeder kept up his campaign. On 18 March he stressed 'the correctness of the view always held by the Navy, namely, that only that naval and air activity which is concentrated on cutting off supplies will help to bring about the defeat of Great Britain'. 'The only real danger to Great Britain lies in a concentrated attack on British shipping by surface ships, U-boats and air forces. Shipping is Great Britain's vulnerable spot. . . . She will be done for if, over a period of little more than six months, the tonnage sunk approximates to the highest rates of sinking achieved during the World War.' On 20 April he demanded 'the continual use of aerial mines at harbour entrances as the most effective way of supplementing operations by U-boats, surface forces and aircraft against British supply lines'. On 25 July, for his swan-song, he roundly declared that 'the incorrect use of the Air Force is now having its effect. In spite of

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the constant request of the Naval Staff, the Air Force did not attack enemy aircraft-carriers and battleships under construction, or the forces in Scapa Flow.' As a result, the growing superiority of the British Fleet was making it more and more difficult for German surface ships—whose effectiveness, as had been shown by the sinking of the *Bismark* on 27 May, was in any case limited by their small numbers and 'the lack of a naval air arm'—to operate in the Atlantic.

By then, however, the German Air Force was embattled in the east. Hitler's attention was almost totally fixed on the Russian campaign after its opening in June. Even Raeder gave up his campaign after July. In the following autumn no meetings were held at all between Hitler and Raeder between 17 September and 13 November.

III

Even before the beginning of the Russian campaign, Hitler's chief interest in the Atlantic had been in the possible effect of operations in that theatre on the American entry into the War. This problem was raised for Hitler by the gradual change in the attitude of the United States, and by the steps taken by the American Government as a result. Under President Roosevelt's initiative, it continued to grow throughout 1941. It was always beyond Hitler's control, though he did what he could to avoid and reduce it.

The starting-points for these developments of 1941 were two steps taken by the United States Government on the outbreak of war. One was the pan-American Declaration of Panama of October, 1939, which established a 'safety belt' round the Americas south of Canada, ranging from 300 to 1,000 miles in width, in which the belligerents were warned to refrain from naval action. More important than this, which was largely ignored both by Germany and the Western Powers, was the United States Neutrality legislation of November, 1939, by which the earlier legislation

forbidding the purchase of arms by belligerents was cancelled in the interests of the Western Powers, but by which, in order to insulate the United States from the conflict, American ships were also forbidden to sail in declared combat or closed zones, so that any purchases made by the Western Powers had to be shipped by those Powers in their own ships.

President Roosevelt's first major step beyond this position was to 'eliminate the dollar sign', to remove the insistence on the purchase of war materials by Great Britain. On 11 March 1941 the Lease-Lend Bill was approved by the House of Representatives and President Roosevelt broadcast to the world that it meant 'the end of compromise with tyranny'; ships, aircraft, food and munitions would henceforth be lent to the United Kingdom. At the same time Raeder began to suspect that American ships were undertaking the escort of convoys as far as Iceland, where the escort duty was taken over by the British.

Raeder's first reaction, on 18 March, was to suggest that Germany should insist that the United States should extend its declared closed areas westwards, so as to include Iceland and the Denmark Straits; that Germany should announce that American ships would be attacked, in the new areas as in the old, without warning; that she should also refuse to respect the pan-American neutrality zone, or should at least restrict recognition of it to 300 miles east of the American coast; and that, even outside the closed areas and the restricted neutrality zone, United States ships should be stopped for examination and sunk or captured if carrying contraband. Hitler's first reaction was to agree to these suggestions; he was even prepared to consider restricting recognition of the American zone to the American 3-mile limit.

But he would give no definite approval; Raeder was still pressing his proposals on 12 April;¹ and on 20 April, after discussions with the Foreign Office, Hitler, despite the fact that the United States Government had recently announced its intention to occupy Greenland for defence purposes, and the extension

¹ *N.D.*, 849-D.

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eastwards of its security zone and patrol areas to 26° West, and despite the fact that these were soon afterwards extended to include Iceland, accepted a compromise. 'In view of America's present undecided attitude towards events in the Balkans,' he decided that the pan-American zone was still to be recognised north of 20°N—in the latitudes corresponding with the coasts of the United States—but that south of that line recognition was to be limited to 300 miles off the coast of America. Within that safety zone, he decided that, as before, no action whatsoever should be taken against United States ships.

As the date approached for the attack on Russia, occasional incidents with United States warships and merchant ships became unavoidable, both because Germany and the United States maintained different interpretations of the limits of the American safety zone, and because the United States, far from declaring the approaches to Iceland a combat zone, closed to American ships, began to provide assistance to Great Britain, in the escorting of convoys and the pursuit of German ships, from the beginning of April.¹ But these incidents only increased Hitler's anxiety for the effect on American opinion, especially as President Roosevelt referred to them on 20 June as acts of piracy in violation of the freedom of the seas; and on 21 June he again declared that 'until operation "Barbarossa" is well under way he wishes to avoid any incident with the U.S.A. . . . After a few weeks the situation will become clearer and be expected to have a favourable effect on the U.S.A. . . . America will have less inclination to enter the war. . . .'

But it was not easy to legislate against further incidents. Far from being a closed area from which American ships were excluded, the approaches to Iceland, the chief operational area for the U-boats at this time, had been included in the American

¹ For the growth of American activity in the Atlantic, see W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. III ('The Grand Alliance'), chap. viii. Among the incidents, the American merchant ship *Robin Moon* was stopped, examined and sunk by a U-boat on 21 May, in 50°N.27°W, and the U.S. battleship *Texas* was chased by a U-boat on 19 and 20 June in about 53°N.31°W.

neutrality zone; and if American merchant ships were not permitted to convoy till 11 July, and if they could easily be recognised by the U-boats when sailing independently, American warships were helping British escorts and convoys with their patrols and could not always be distinguished from British escorts during attacks on convoys, especially at night. To meet this difficulty Raeder suggested on 21 June that attacks on warships should be forbidden in a 50 or 100 miles strip to the East of the western boundary of the German closed zone. But Hitler was not content with this. To make assurance doubly sure, he insisted that attacks on warships, British and American, should be forbidden altogether for the next few weeks, in order to eliminate incidents as far as possible.

An order to this effect was issued at once to all U-boats, the only exception allowed being attacks on warships of cruiser size and above which were definitely recognised as British. It was later added that, though it remained permissible to attack all merchant ships without warning outside the limits of the American zone as recognised by Germany, American merchant ships to the eastward of those limits were also to be spared when they were recognised.

On 7 July President Roosevelt took a further step, announcing that United States naval forces were being sent to Iceland, the defence of which had already been taken over by the United States Army. Raeder accordingly demanded, on 9 July, whether this step was to be considered 'as an entry into the War, or as an act of provocation which should be ignored'. Hitler was as anxious as ever 'to postpone the entry of the United States for another one or two months. . . . The Eastern campaign must be carried on with the entire Air Force, which he does not want to divert even in part. . . . A victorious campaign will have a tremendous effect on the whole situation and probably also on the attitude of the U.S.A. Therefore, for the time being, he does not wish the existing instructions changed but rather wants to be sure that incidents will be avoided.'

There was resistance to this policy from the Naval Staff. It

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forbade attacks on warships altogether, unless the ships were definitely identified as enemy and of cruiser size and above; it insisted that, if recognised, American merchant ships should be immune. The instructions, moreover, were difficult to apply in the prevailing confusion of Atlantic rules and areas, and could not absolutely ensure that further incidents would be avoided. Hitler therefore found it necessary to make some concessions to pressure and practicability. On 18 July,¹ in a 'supplement to the order forbidding attacks on United States warships and merchant vessels in the operational area of the North Atlantic', attacks on American ships, whether in United States or British convoys or independently routed, were again authorised within the limits of the old American combat zones. On 25 July he assured Raeder that he 'will never call a U-boat commander to account if he torpedoes an American ship by mistake'. But the old American combat zones, round the coasts of the United Kingdom, had little or no relevance to current operations; 'the sea-route United States-Iceland' was specifically excluded from the authorisation of 18 July; and on 25 July he reiterated his anxiety 'to avoid incidents if possible, in order to avoid having the U.S.A. declare war while the Russian campaign is still in progress'. On 22 August, in the same frame of mind, he resisted a suggestion from the Naval Staff that the pan-American zone in South American waters, then recognised by Germany up to 300 miles off the coast, should be limited to 20 miles.

But further incidents could not be avoided;² and they encouraged President Roosevelt to take the initiative once again. On 11 September he issued his 'shoot first' order and declared that 'from now on, if German or Italian vessels of war enter the waters the protection of which is necessary for American defence, they do so at their peril'. On 15 September his Secretary of the Navy defined

¹ *N.D.*, 118-C.

² The merchant vessel *Sessa*, flying the Panama flag, was sunk on 17 August, 300 miles S.W. of Iceland. There was an engagement between the U.S. destroyer *Greer* and a U-boat at 63°N.27°30'W on 4 September.

the expression 'the waters' by stating that 'the American Navy will protect ships sailing, under all flags, carrying lease-lend material between the American continent and the waters of Iceland, as completely as lies in our power'. On 16 September direct protection was given to British convoys from Halifax for the first time.¹ Anticipating this development from the President's speech, Raeder, on 17 September, declared that 'there is no longer any difference between British and American ships'; and he and Doenitz submitted to Hitler, at the meeting of this date, detailed and extensive amendments to the existing German instructions governing the war in the Atlantic.

The gist of their proposals was that any warship, British or American, escorting a convoy, and any merchant ship in convoy, should be liable to be sunk, inside or outside the American defence zone, except in an area up to 20 miles off the American coast or up to 60° West, which should be the limit of the American defence zone as recognised by Germany. Hitler still insisted, however, that 'care be taken to avoid any incidents in the war on merchant shipping before about the middle of October'; and after a detailed discussion of the situation as a whole, in which it appeared that 'the end of September will bring the great decision in the Russian campaign', Raeder and Doenitz withdrew their suggestions.

The problem was not discussed again for two months. There was, indeed, no conference at all between Hitler and Raeder from 17 September to the middle of November; all Hitler's time and all his mind were given to the Eastern campaign. But his attitude to the Atlantic situation underwent no change. At the very next opportunity, on 13 November, Raeder asked him what his attitude would be if the United States went even further and repealed the Neutrality Act, which still forbade United States merchant ships to proceed to British ports or, indeed, to appear east of Iceland. Hitler's answer was that he would let the existing orders stand, which meant that, in view of the latest supplement of 18 July, 'all

¹ W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. III ('The Grand Alliance'), p. 459.

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merchant ships, including American ones, may be torpedoed without warning, but only in the old combat areas', and that American warships remained free from attack.

Hitler's other remark was that further orders would 'depend on how the situation developed'. But, though the United States Senate voted for the repeal of the Neutrality Act on 30 October, and the House of Representatives on 13 November, the United States Government had still not taken the formal step of repeal when the state of affairs was transformed from another quarter. The situation in the Atlantic, as did Hitler's attitude towards it, remained as it had been left in September until, with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941, the United States at last entered the War.

CHAPTER IX

GERMAN-JAPANESE NEGOTIATIONS IN 1941

I

HITLER's negotiations with Japan, in the months before the attack on Pearl Harbour, were inconsistent with the object he sought with his policy in the Atlantic. At first, it is true, his efforts with Japan were guided by the hope that, in conjunction with the German attack on Russia, the Japanese entry into the War would ensure the final collapse of Great Britain and deter the United States from entering the struggle; and to this end his first objective was to persuade the Japanese to attack Singapore without delay. But he was forced to admit from the outset that such a move by Japan might bring America in on Great Britain's side; and, as the negotiations proceeded, provoked by Japan's delaying tactics, he became increasingly disposed to accept that risk, despite his caution in the Atlantic.

Pressure to persuade Japan to attack Singapore was first brought to bear on 23 February 1941, at a conference between Ribbentrop and General Oshima, the Japanese Ambassador in Berlin.¹ Ribbentrop was at pains, during this interview, to emphasise that Germany was already the victor in the West, that the collapse of Great Britain was only a matter of time. But he was even more anxious to persuade Japan to enter the War at once, with an attack in South-East Asia. Japan must act soon if she wished 'to secure for herself, during the War, the position she wants to hold in the New World Order at the time for the Peace Treaty'. 'We have the desire', he went on, 'to end the War quickly and to force England to sue for peace soon. To this end the co-operation of

¹ *N.D.*, 1834-PS; *Proceedings*, Part 2, pp. 263-6, 279-80.

Japan is important. . . .’ Japan’s intervention would destroy Great Britain’s key position in the Far East:

the effect on the morale of the British people would be very serious and this would contribute towards a quick ending to the War A surprise intervention by Japan was bound to keep America out of the War. America, who is at present not armed and who would hesitate to expose her Navy to risks west of Hawaii, could do this even less in such an eventuality. If Japan would otherwise respect American interests there would not even be the possibility for Roosevelt to use the argument of lost prestige and to make war plausible to the Americans. . . . It should be possible to keep America out by skilfully considering the politics of the Axis Powers.

Hitler, while hoping that Japan’s intervention, coming on top of the German attack on Russia, would deter the United States, had always recognised that his plan might not succeed in this direction. On 8 January 1941, in spite of the hope that, ‘if Russia collapsed, Japan would be greatly relieved and this in turn would mean increased danger to the U.S.A.’, he had felt that ‘the Japanese should be given a free hand regarding Singapore, even if this may entail the risk that the U.S.A. is forced to take drastic steps’. Ribbentrop, therefore, despite the above assertion, thought it prudent to admit that a Japanese attack in South-East Asia might bring the United States into the War. But he went on to argue that this was a risk that should be taken.

He mentioned further that

if America should declare war because of Japan’s entry, this would prove that America had had the intention of entering the War sooner or later in any case. . . . Even though it would be preferable to avoid this, her entry would be by no means decisive and would not endanger the final victory of the countries of the Three-Power Pact. . . . A temporary lift of the British morale caused by America’s entry would be cancelled out by Japan’s entry. In any case, should the Americans enter the war they will not wage the war militarily at all. . . . In East Asia America would hardly dare to send its fleet beyond Hawaii. . . . In the Atlantic there is a lack of commitment possibilities, except for England. Landing in Europe is impossible, and Africa is too far away. . . . In an air attack Germany would always be superior. . . . And

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if, contrary to all expectations, the Americans should be careless enough to send their Navy beyond Hawaii, this would represent the biggest chance for the Axis Powers to bring the War rapidly to an end.

Ribbentrop was confident that 'the Japanese Fleet would, in that case, do a complete job'.

He was, in all these remarks, merely embroidering views which Hitler had already outlined and which Hitler again expressed in a directive or *Basic Order* of the following 5 March.¹ Signed by Keitel as Chief of the O.K.W., this Order was the authoritative statement of Hitler's policy concerning collaboration with Japan.

It must be the aim [it read] to induce Japan, as soon as possible, to take active measures in the Far East. Strong British forces will thereby be tied down, the centre of gravity of the interests of the United States will be diverted to the Pacific. The sooner Japan intervenes the greater will be the prospects of her success. . . . Operation 'Barbarossa' will create political and military prerequisites which will be particularly favourable for this. . . . The harmonising of the two operational plans of the two countries is the responsibility of the Navy High Command. It will be subject to the following guiding principles:

(a) The common aim of the conduct of the War is to be stressed as that of forcing England quickly to the ground, thereby keeping the United States out of the War. . . .

(b) The seizure of Singapore as the key British position in the Far East would mean a decisive success for the entire conduct of the War by the Axis Powers.

In addition, attacks on other bases of British naval power—extending to those of American naval power only if the entry of the United States into the War cannot be prevented—will weaken the enemy's system of power in that region and. . . tie down substantial forces of all kinds (Australia)

Raeder's attitude was the same as Hitler's. He, too, took the view that it was vital for the war against Great Britain to persuade Japan to take immediate action against Singapore, that the United States could probably be kept out of the War if Japan acted quickly, but that the risk of failure in this respect should be accepted.

¹ *N.D.*, 75-C; *Proceedings*, Part 2, pp. 206-68.

GERMAN PRESSURE FOR AN ATTACK ON SINGAPORE

Japan [he declared at a meeting on 18 March 1941] wants to avoid war with the U.S.A. if possible, and she could do this if she would take Singapore by a decisive attack as soon as possible. The U.S.A. is not prepared to wage war on Japan; the entire British Fleet is tied down; the opportunity is more favourable than it will ever be again. Japan is preparing the move but, according to the statements of Japanese officers, she will not carry it out until Germany invades Great Britain. Hence Germany must make every effort to get Japan to act at once. . . .

Hitler and Ribbentrop, in further meetings with the Japanese in Berlin, did make further efforts to this end. On 29 March Ribbentrop repeated his earlier arguments to the Japanese Foreign Minister, Matsuoka, who was visiting Berlin.¹

The British Navy. . . . would not be able to send a single ship to the Far East. . . . U.S. submarines were so bad that Japan need not bother about them at all. . . . America could do nothing against Japan. . . . Roosevelt would think twice before deciding on active measures. . . . The Führer—who probably must be considered the greatest expert on military questions at the present time—could advise Japan on the best method of attack against Singapore. . . . With the capture of Singapore Japan would gain decisive influence over the Netherlands East Indies. . . .

On 4 April Hitler himself met Matsuoka,² who made it clear that 'Japan would do her utmost to avoid a war with the United States'. Hitler's reply summarised his views at that date. 'Germany, too, considers war with the United States undesirable. . . .' On the other hand, although it was vital that Japan should act against Singapore, there was the risk that this would involve the United States; and this risk had to be accepted.

Providence favoured those who would not let dangers come to them, but who would bravely face them. [Germany] has already made allowances for such a contingency. . . . Germany has made her preparations so that no American could land in Europe. She would conduct a most energetic fight against America with her U-boats and Air Force and, due to her superior experience. . . , would be vastly superior. . . . Germany would strike without delay in the event of war between America and Japan, because the strength of the tripartite Powers lies in their joint action. . . .

¹ *N.D.*, 1877-PS; *Proceedings*, Part 2, pp. 269-71.

² *N.D.*, 1881-PS; *Proceedings*, Part 1, pp. 178-80.

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In a final meeting with Matsuoka on 5 April¹ Ribbentrop returned, among other things, to his original theme.

He wanted Matsuoka to take back to Japan with him the following points. Germany had already won the War. . . . But it would hasten victory if Japan entered the War. This would undoubtedly be more in Japan's interest than in Germany's, for it offered a unique opportunity, which would hardly return, for the fulfilment of the national objectives of Japan, a chance which would enable her to play a really leading role in East Asia. . . .

But he conceded, as Hitler had done, that, with regard to the United States, 'it was necessary, of course, to accept a certain risk'.

Outstanding in this aspect of the negotiations with Japan is Hitler's wilfulness in taking risks and in pursuing confused and incompatible aims. On the one hand, he wanted to keep the United States out of the War; and his own efforts in the Atlantic in 1941 to secure this aim was adequate testimony to his anxiety on this score. On the other hand, he was even more anxious to end the war with Great Britain, 'to weaken England's position', as Ribbentrop put it at the Nuremberg Trial, 'and thus achieve peace';² and he was accordingly prepared to risk the entry of America in return for the entry of Japan. This wilfulness increased with each Japanese delay; but it was present from the beginning; and if it was chiefly due to his wish to force a settlement with Great Britain, it was also the result, in part, as it had been in the decision to attack Russia, of an unmeasured confidence in the strength of his European position, of a refusal to face the consequences of the American entry. Much as he wanted to avoid that development, he was more interested in delaying it than in escaping it altogether; and he was led to invite it in the Far East, while trying to avoid it in the Atlantic, by the conviction that, though it would be unfortunate, it would not be disastrous.

¹ *N.D.*, 1862-PS; *Proceedings*, Part 2, pp. 271-2.

² *Proceedings*, Part 10, p. 200.

II

If what has been said reveals the confused and divided nature of Hitler's aims, another aspect of the Japanese-German negotiations reveals the disunity of the Axis Powers and the extent to which Hitler was himself responsible for that disunity. The attack on Pearl Harbour, occurring while he was making every effort in the Atlantic to avoid, or at least to postpone, the American entry into the War, achieving in a few hours what he had sought to prevent for months, was a disaster which he had courted since the beginning of the year. But if it was a development which, with greater care, he might have avoided, it was also one of which, because of his method of conducting the negotiations, he received no warning in advance.

In his relations with Japan, as in those with Italy, he made no attempt effectively to collaborate with a country that was admittedly an important factor in his plans. He was temperamentally incapable of co-operation or negotiation. It was characteristic of his attitude to such questions that he could speak as if it lay within his power to command co-operation—could feel, for example, as he said on 8 January 1941, that 'the Japanese should be given a free hand regarding Singapore'—but would never bend or work to promote it.

What, in particular, in his relations with Japan, created trouble for the future was his refusal to divulge his intention to attack Russia. It was for this reason that Ribbentrop, although he mentioned Russia at the meeting with Oshima on 23 February 1941, contented himself with saying that, 'if an unwanted conflict should arise with Russia', Germany would be prepared for it and would have 'to carry the main burden. . .'.¹ In the *Basic Order* of 5 March Hitler stated specifically that 'the Japanese must not be given any intimation of the "Barbarossa" operations';² and it was this instruction that was the occasion of Raeder's remarks on 18 March. He agreed that Japan should be encouraged to take

¹ *N.D.*, 1834-PS.

² *N.D.*, 75-C.

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Singapore, whatever the risks of intervention by the U.S.A. His purpose, indeed, in raising the subject at that time was to get Hitler to act more decisively during the forthcoming visit to Germany of the Japanese Foreign Minister, Matsuoka, in order to secure early Japanese action. But the Naval Commander-in-Chief was already concerned about the difficulties of collaboration with Japan, and the danger that too little attention would be paid to the need to overcome them. In particular, he urged on 18 March that, contrary to the policy laid down in the recent order, and as part of the effort to encourage her to act against Singapore, Japan should be informed of the intended attack on Russia. 'The Japanese Foreign Minister', he argued, 'has grave doubts because of the Russian problem—doubts relating to the Japanese entry into the War—and Matsuoka should therefore be informed about our intentions against Russia.'¹

At the first meeting with Matsuoka held on 29 March, it is clear that Ribbentrop, in spite of Raeder's suggestion, was still under orders to do no more than hint at the possibility of a Russo-German war.² That he did even this was due to the fact that Russo-Japanese negotiations for a pact between the two countries were already in train. Ribbentrop was thus forced to begin by saying that 'it would probably be best, in view of the whole situation, not to carry the discussions with the Russians too far'; and then it was necessary to justify this statement. 'He did not know,' he continued, 'how the situation would develop. One thing, however, was certain, that Germany would strike at once if Russia should ever attack Japan. He was ready to give Matsuoka this positive assurance so that Japan could push forward to the south on Singapore without fear of possible complications with Russia. . . .' He then went even further with his hints. 'The largest part of the German Army', he added, 'is in any case on the Eastern frontiers of the Reich, and fully prepared to open the attack at any time. . . .

¹ See the report of this meeting in the German Navy files (*N.D.*, 170-C, item 134). Raeder's comments are also reported in *N.D.*, 152-C.

² *N.D.*, 1877-PS; *Proceedings*, Part 2, pp. 269-71.

HITLER'S REFUSAL TO INFORM JAPAN

Should Germany enter into a conflict with Russia, the U.S.S.R. would be finished off in a few months. . . . He wanted to point out to Matsuoka that a conflict with Russia was anyhow within the realm of possibility. . . . The situation was such that a conflict, even if it were not probable, would have to be considered possible.'

Ribbentrop was obviously anxious, from the way he talked, to place the responsibility for the Russo-German war on Russia's shoulders in advance: he believed, he told Matsuoka, 'that Russia would try to avoid developments leading to war. . . ; but it was uncertain whether or not Stalin would intensify his present unfriendly policy against Germany. . . '. It is equally obvious that, for all his hints, he was still under orders to hide the fact that Hitler had already decided on the Eastern campaign.

That this continued to be Hitler's policy is seen from his remarks on 20 April, when Raeder enquired about the results of the Matsuoka visit. 'What', asked Raeder, 'were the results of Matsuoka's visit? Was operation "Barbarossa" mentioned during the conference? What views are held regarding the Russo-Japanese Pact?' Hitler's reply was distinctly evasive. Matsuoka had been told that 'Russia will not be attacked so long as she maintains a friendly attitude in accordance with the Treaty; if this is not the case the Führer reserves the right to take suitable action'. This was a good as being a rejection of Raeder's proposal that Japan should be informed in advance of the plan to turn on Russia. As for Raeder's last point, Hitler was content to say that 'the Russo-Japanese Pact was concluded with Germany's acquiescence. . . ; Japan is now restrained from taking action against Vladivostok and should be induced to attack Singapore instead'.

It has to be admitted that Japan had no intention of attacking Singapore unless and until it fitted in with her own plans and intentions. As to what those plans should be, the Japanese Government itself was in any case divided and uncertain: at the same time as Matsuoka was sent to Berlin and Moscow, the Navy and Air Commands were ordered to plan operations against Pearl Harbour and the Philippines, and Nomura was sent to Washington

GERMAN-JAPANESE NEGOTIATIONS IN 1941

to explore the chances of a settlement.¹ It is also true that, just as it knew the risk of the American entry, so the Japanese Government, if only because of German hints, assumed that a Russo-German war was possible. Its intentions, according to the German military attaché on 24 May,² were to recognise its treaty obligations and attack Manila and Singapore if the United States entered the War and, 'if a Russo-German war causes the entry of the United States', to carry out the above operations and possibly attack Vladivostok and Blagovesquensk³ as well. Despite these promises, moreover, German blandishment and pressure were having little effect on Japan's calculations even before the German attack on Russia. By 22 May 1941, when he asked Hitler for another report on relations with Japan, Raeder was already worried. He was 'under the impression that the Japanese were rather cool; Nomura is negotiating in Washington!' Hitler's reply revealed the state of affairs. He had 'no clear picture of the situation; but obviously there are internal political difficulties in Japan'.

In this situation, even a special German effort might have been in vain; but such an effort would seem to have been worth making. Yet Hitler clung to his policy of keeping secret his intention to attack Russia, and was content to add, on 22 May, that 'the good friendship policy is to be continued'. And when, still unannounced to Japan, the Eastern campaign was eventually opened in the following month, the result was a further serious deterioration in German-Japanese relations. Matsuoka lost face and office because he had not known of Hitler's intention; the majority of the Government swung against his recommendation that Japan should join Germany, invoking Article 5 of the Tripartite Pact, which stated that the instrument was not valid against Russia; and it was decided to go ahead with Japan's own preparations for an offensive in the southern seas of which Germany should be kept in ignorance.⁴

¹ See W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. III ('The Grand Alliance'), p. 161.

² *N.D.*, 1538-PS.

³ Or Blagovestchensk: a town on the Manchurian border of the U.S.S.R.

⁴ See W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. III ('The Grand Alliance'), p. 172.

III

Matters were next made worse, first by the fact that the German negotiators were unrepentant, not to say oblivious, of their mistake; secondly by the fact that, after the attack on Russia, they increased and altered their demands on Japan with a total lack of concern for the strategic issues with which Japan was faced. Having, so far, in order to keep their own intentions secret, welcomed the Russo-Japanese Treaty and pressed for an attack on Singapore instead of on Russia, they now began to press for an attack on Vladivostok as well as, or instead of, an attack on Singapore.

Ribbentrop, in a meeting with the Japanese Ambassador on 9 July, and in a telegram to the German Ambassador in Tokyo on 10 July, outlined the new policy. In the telegram¹ he urged that

the present Japanese Government would really act inexcusably toward the future of its nation if it did not take this unique opportunity to solve the Russian problem, as well as to secure for all time its expansion to the south and a settlement of the Chinese matter. Since Russia . . . is close to collapse. . . it is simply impossible that Japan should not solve the question of Vladivostok and the Siberian area as soon as her military preparations are completed. . . . I ask you to employ all available means in further insisting on Japan's entry into the War against Russia at the earliest possible date, as I have mentioned already in my note to Matsuoka. . . . The natural objective still remains that we and the Japanese join hands on the Trans-Siberian railway before the winter. After the collapse of Russia the position of the Three-Power-Pact states will be so gigantic that the question of England's collapse or the total destruction of the English islands will only be a matter of time. An America totally isolated from the rest of the world would then be faced with our taking possession of the remaining positions of the British Empire which are important for the Three-Power-Pact countries. . . .

The German Ambassador replied on 13 July² that he was 'trying with all means to work towards Japan's entry into the War against

¹ *N.D.*, 2896-PS; *Proceedings*, Part 2, p. 273.

² *N.D.*, 2897-PS; *Proceedings*, Part 2, p. 274.

Russia as soon as possible. . .'; and he believed that 'Japanese participation will soon take place'.

In his talk to the Japanese Ambassador¹ Ribbentrop had made it clear that this was Hitler's wish; but he went out of his way to say that Hitler only wanted Japan to attack Russia if she felt 'strong enough for such an undertaking: under no circumstances should Japanese operations against Russia be allowed to bog down half way'. What is not so clear is whether Hitler, when he ordered this new policy, recognised that a Japanese attack on Russia could only be obtained at the expense of abandoning the previous plan for a Japanese attack on Singapore. But, though Ribbentrop's telegram of 10 July mentioned 'expansion to the south' as well as 'the Russian problem', this risk was implicit in the switching of German pressure towards the new objective; and Hitler's own remarks, a few weeks later, indicate that he was prepared to take that risk. On 22 August, asked by Raeder for his opinion on Japan's attitude, he replied that he 'was convinced that Japan will carry out the attack on Vladivostok as soon as forces have been assembled'. Apart from the fact that he seemed quite content with this situation, he did not mention Singapore at all; though he added that he assumed that 'positions in Indo-China are being secured by Japan at the same time'.

IV

If the German Government showed signs of preferring, in the altered circumstances, an attack on Russia to an attack on Singapore, they failed to indicate this clearly enough when asking for both. In fact, they seem not to have known which they preferred; and in the event, they got the attack on Pearl Harbour instead of either.

The belief that Japan would turn on Russia, though obviously based on the opinion of the German Ambassador in Tokyo, was guess-work; and it was wrong. More than ever, since the German

¹ *N.D.*, 2911-PS.

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attack on Russia, of which they were not informed in advance, the Japanese had been going their own way, making their own calculations for themselves, and extending no confidences to the Germans. On 30 November, it is true, they instructed their Ambassador to warn the other Axis governments that negotiations with the United States had reached a deadlock, that war might break out suddenly between Japan and the Anglo-Saxon Powers, and that it might 'come quicker than anyone dreams'.¹ But their striking force had already left Kure naval base for Pearl Harbour between 16 and 18 November;² and some such warning was unavoidable if they were to obtain a reassurance that Germany and Italy would declare war on the United States should Japan take that step. The warning was framed, moreover, in the vaguest of terms, and the Japanese Government was equally non-committal in other channels at this time.

The Japanese Ambassador in Berlin told Ribbentrop on 28 November that he was 'not aware of the concrete intentions of Japan';³ he was either not informed of his Government's intentions or else under orders not to reveal them. And it was not until 6 December that he was informed that Japan did not intend to launch an attack on Russia.⁴ The German Ambassador and his staff in Tokyo were also denied all knowledge of Japan's precise plan. On 30 November⁵ the Ambassador informed Berlin that the Japanese Foreign Minister was afraid of a breach with the United States and that the Japanese Government was busy working out its plans for this eventuality; but he added that it 'has no particulars at the moment'. On 3 December the German Naval Attaché⁶ guessed that 'speedy military action to the south by the Japanese armed forces is to be expected', and on 6 December he reported that war between Japan and the United States was inevitable. But he added

¹ *N.D.*, 3598-PS. For the reception of this warning, see Ciano's *Diary* for 3 December 1941.

² See S. E. Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol. III, p. 88.

³ *N.D.*, 656-D; *Proceedings*, Part 4, p. 95.

⁴ *N.D.*, 2898-PS.

⁵ *N.D.*, 3600-PS.

⁶ *N.D.*, 872-D.

to this report, on the day before the Pearl Harbour attack, that the Japanese would not divulge the zero hour. He could only assume that it would be in three weeks time, and that the southern offensive would consist of simultaneous attacks on Siam, the Philippines and Borneo.

On all this evidence, there is no reason to doubt the many statements made at the Nuremberg Trial¹ to the effect that the attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941 was a surprise, as complete as it was unpleasant, to the German Government. Ciano, moreover, in his *Diary* for 4 December 1941, confirmed that it was unpleasant. 'Berlin's reaction', he wrote, 'to the Japanese request [for a promise of declaration of war on the United States if necessary] is extremely cautious. Perhaps they will agree because they cannot get out of it, but the idea of provoking America's intervention pleases the Germans less and less. . . .'

Hitler did agree to the Japanese request after the Pearl Harbour attack. He declared war on the U.S.A. on 11 December, and on 14 December he officially congratulated the Japanese Ambassador. He did this as one to whom the method, at least, of the Pearl Harbour attack made a direct appeal. 'You gave', he said, 'the right declaration of war. This is the only proper method; it corresponds with my own. Negotiate as long as possible; but if you see that the other is interested in putting you off, in shaming and humiliating you, then strike as hard as possible and don't waste time declaring war. . . .'²

But his own behaviour belies his words and confirms Ciano's estimate; and not only his behaviour in the Atlantic in 1941. His attitude in 1942, both toward the Japanese offensive and to the War as a whole, shows that he regretted the Japanese move and considered Pearl Harbour a disaster.

¹ See, for example, *Proceedings*, Part 10, p. 139 and p. 200; Part 14, p. 167; Part 15, p. 350.

² *N.D.*, 2932-PS.

CHAPTER X

1942

I

THE attack on Pearl Harbour was a striking example of the disunity of the Axis Powers; it was the result, as well, of Hitler's own inability to co-operate with others, of his wilful acceptance of risks, of his intuitive pursuit of confused and divided aims. But if it seemed to him to be a disastrous development, that was chiefly because he had also failed to defeat Russia 'in a rapid campaign'. For this reason, his attitude to the War, if not his actual strategy, was fundamentally defensive, if not defeatist, before the attack on Pearl Harbour occurred; and that remarkable operation, coming so soon on his disappointment in Russia, far from offering new opportunities and welcome relief, seemed yet another reverse. The possible consequences of the American entry far outweighed, for him, the opportunities provided by the entry of Japan.

This is made quite clear by the fact that Raeder took the other view. Surprised by the Japanese attack, anxious about the United States, he still felt that the Japanese entry could be turned to good account. On some fronts it could offer new opportunities. Japan's intention, after this single and successful attempt to destroy the United States Fleet, was clearly to turn on South-East Asia, against British and Dutch positions, and to threaten the British control of the Indian Ocean. This would greatly increase the embarrassment of the British in the Middle East, and should assist Germany in a final successful attack on the key position of Suez. In the Atlantic, on account of the withdrawal of American merchant shipping and escort forces to the Pacific, 'the situation with regard to surface warfare by heavy ships and auxiliary cruisers will probably change

in our favour', while U-boats could be despatched to a new and probably profitable area off the American east coast.

On other fronts, in Raeder's view, the Japanese entry provided a most welcome breathing-space. 'The danger of major operations against the west coast of France', he declared on 12 December 1941, 'will decrease for the present . . . and such a respite will be very welcome.' Anglo-American action against Dakar, the Azores, the Cape Verdes and North-West Africa, of which danger he had been so anxious for so long, also ceased, in his view, to be imminent. 'The U.S.A. will have to concentrate all their strength in the Pacific for the next few months; Britain will not want to run any risks. . . ; it is hardly likely that transport tonnage will be available for such occupation tasks.'

As long as the Japanese operations continued to be successful Raeder kept up these arguments; but after April 1942 they could no longer be sustained. Japanese air attacks on Ceylon at the end of March were the last blow delivered in the Indian Ocean; the Japanese threat in that area never developed. Both there and in the Pacific, Japanese expansion reached its maximum extent within a few months of the attack on Pearl Harbour. As the U.S. Navy recovered its strength the Japanese had to impose some limits on the dispersal of their war effort to the westward; while in the Pacific itself American sea-power recovered in time to stem the Japanese advance, and to save Hawaii, New Zealand and Australia from attack, with naval victories in the Coral Sea and at Midway Island in May and June.

Even in these few months of uninterrupted Japanese successes, Raeder's representations were of no avail. The breathing-space which Raeder thought they provided, and which was short-lived in any case, failed to comfort Hitler; the opportunities which were opened up, fleeting in any case, never once impressed him. The U-boats, it is true, were diverted to the American east coast, where they at once achieved great successes. But the U-boats were already available; they were already meeting difficulties in their old operational areas; their transfer required no real decision. In

THE CANCELLATION OF 'SEA LION'

every other respect, the first few months of 1942, like the rest of the year, were a period of gloom and indecision in which Hitler, embattled in Russia, grew desperately anxious in Western Europe, remained irresolute in the Mediterranean, and became more consciously helpless about North-West Africa than he had been before.

II

The final cancellation of operation 'Sea Lion', the first serious decision of the year, was less important for itself than as an indication of the state of mind to which Hitler had already been reduced, and as a foretaste of what was to come.

In reality, if only because of the failure to bring the Eastern campaign to a speedy end, the possibility of invading England never recurred after the autumn of 1940. Even when taking the Russian decision, Hitler seemed rather to have hoped that Great Britain would surrender if 'deprived of her last remaining ally on the Continent' than to have looked forward to conditions in which 'Sea Lion' could be remounted. He realised that, even if Russia should quickly collapse, almost a year would then have gone by, in which Great Britain would have looked to her defences, to make the prospect of invasion still less inviting than it had been in September 1940. Yet the 'Sea Lion' plan remained in being; it was abandoned only in stages, and reluctantly, throughout 1941; and its final cancellation was only ordered after the entry into the war of the United States and Japan.

The first stage in this piecemeal abandonment of the plan occurred, as already related, on 3 December 1940, when the war production authorities were informed that 'Sea Lion' preparations 'were merely to be concluded'.¹ But this decision was slow to take effect. On 27 December 1940, immediately after Hitler's decision to attack Russia, Raeder protested that the maintenance of readiness for 'Sea Lion'—the improvement of facilities, the construction of invasion barges—was absorbing labour and material that could ill

¹ *N.D.*, 2353-PS, pp. 323-4.

be spared; in particular, it was delaying the U-boat programme. He was allowed 'to take measures to relieve the situation somewhat further, without, however, it being apparent, since the Führer believes the operation will in all probability not take place until the summer of 1941'. Hitler was even more dubious about its prospects on the following 8 January 1941. 'The invasion of Britain', he then declared, 'is not feasible unless she is crippled to a considerable degree. . . ; the success of an invasion must be absolutely assured; otherwise the Führer considers it a crime to attempt it.' He therefore sanctioned a further slackening of the preparations. On 20 January 1941, he told the Italians that, with regard to 'Sea Lion', 'we are in the position of a man with only one round left in his rifle: if he misses, the situation is much worse than before. The landing can only be attempted once; if it failed Great Britain would no longer have to worry, and could employ the bulk of her forces where she chooses. As long as the attempt has not been made, Great Britain must always reckon with its possibility'.¹ On the following 3 February, at the conference with his own Commanders-in-Chief, it was admitted that "'Sea Lion" can no longer be carried out'.²

Raeder was confident, by then, that the invasion of England would never be ordered except, as he said on 18 March 1941, 'in a sort of desperation': 'No one doubts to-day', he added, 'that it would fail under any conditions; and the repercussion of such a German catastrophe would not fail to lead to internal collapse in Germany.' But this was far from being Hitler's position. One reason, it is true, for his continued refusal to abandon 'Sea Lion' altogether was his interest in it as a blind to cover his intentions against Russia. 'For as long', he announced at a meeting on 4 February, 'as the operation must be maintained as a blind, the preparatory measures for it cannot be further reduced'; and he was anxious that 'the deception be kept up particularly in the spring'. But his other remarks at this time suggest that, when he was being most emphatic that 'Sea Lion' should not be attempted, he was

¹ *N.D.*, 134-C.

² *N.D.*, 872-PS.

being so chiefly in order to provide further justification for his decision to attack Russia, and that, in reality, he could not bring himself to accept the view that 'Sea Lion' had become impracticable for ever. At any rate, in the speech to the Italians on 20 January,¹ he prefaced his remarks about 'Sea Lion' with the statement that 'the attack on the British Isles remains our ultimate aim'; and if, because of the audience on this occasion, this statement is of little value as an indication of his attitude, it is still the case that when the attack on Russia had begun, and had put an end to the argument that 'Sea Lion' must be maintained as a deceptive measure, he found further excuses for keeping it in readiness.

When Raeder asked him on 25 July 'whether it is now going to serve only as a camouflage, or whether it is actually to be carried out', he admitted that it could not be launched before the spring of 1942; but he thought that Raeder's question could not yet be answered definitely. 'Great Britain might still weaken if she sees there is no longer a chance of winning'; the threat of 'Sea Lion' might still be necessary to finish her off. By 22 August 1941, he had found yet another and more defensive reason for keeping the plan alive. Raeder had presented a memorandum proposing further reductions in the state of readiness for 'Sea Lion'; Hitler had not yet reached a decision. But his reply to Raeder's questions was that he wanted to postpone a decision because he 'was anxious that the threat to Britain should never quite cease, so that as many British forces as possible will be tied down'.

'Sea Lion' was not discussed again until 13 February 1942, two months after the attack on Pearl Harbour. On that date Raeder requested a decision on the extent to which the 'commitments of personnel and material for operation "Sea Lion", which are still very considerable, have to remain in force'. He proposed that, as it could not possibly be carried out in 1942, the operation should be cancelled from a military point of view. Hitler assented to this proposal without argument, a fact which is significant in contrast with his reluctance to abandon the operation in 1941.

¹ *N.D.*, 134-C.

III

The disappearance, in the West, of all the offensive possibilities of 1940, and Hitler's final acceptance of that fact after much delay, were accompanied by a growing anticipation of danger in that area. This gradual acceptance of the reversal of circumstances, culminating at one end of the scale in the cancellation of 'Sea Lion', was similarly completed at the other when the American entry into the War led Hitler to develop serious anxieties for the German position in Western Europe, in spite of his earlier confidence.

Following so closely on the failure to defeat Russia before the winter of 1941, the American entry had the effect of making him far less confident than Raeder about the threat to the vast German-occupied coastline from the North Cape to the Franco-Spanish frontier and, beyond that, to French North-West Africa. On 12 December 1941, five days after the attack on Pearl Harbour, and notwithstanding Raeder's assurances to the contrary, he clearly suspected that 'the U.S.A. and Britain will abandon East Asia for a time in order to crush Italy and Germany first'. He was concerned lest 'the enemy will in the near future take steps to occupy the Azores, the Cape Verdes, perhaps even Dakar, in order to win back prestige lost as a result of the setbacks in the Pacific'. He 'did not wish to postpone the speedy reinforcements of the fortifications in Western France'.

Thereafter, as will be seen, his anxiety for North-West Africa and the Atlantic islands was suppressed until June 1942; and his anxiety for Western France became less acute for a time. On 22 January 1942 he was 'of the same opinion as the Naval Staff concerning the improbability of a landing in Western France'; and, though he could not resist issuing, in February, Directive No. 40, which first laid down the organisation to be adopted by the three Services in the event of an invasion in Western Europe, even the British raid on St Nazaire, on 28 March 1942, failed to alter this opinion. That operation showed, indeed, as Raeder reported on

13 April, that 'we have no means of repulsing an enemy landing attempt'; but Hitler and the Naval Staff feared, for the moment at least, only a repetition of such raids, and not a major landing; and Hitler was content to demand that 'at least the most important naval bases be so well protected that successful raids would be impossible'.

No advantage was derived, however, from this revival of confidence concerning Western France and this suppression of anxiety for North-West Africa. Hitler's anxiety for North-West Africa was never far below the surface; his renewed confidence for Western France was only temporary, and by September 1942 he had ordered the erection of 'extensive coastal fortifications' in that area.¹ More important still, neither of these things was an indication that his immediate anxiety for the West had, in fact, declined; for both were a reflection of the fact that his concern for the West had begun to express itself in an extraordinary fear for the safety of Norway.

As early as 18 March 1941 he had ordered the reinforcement of coastal artillery in Norway, the transfer of additional air units to these areas and the establishment of a special organisation for the defence of Narvik. On the same day it was decided to send the *Tirpitz* to Trondhjem before she had finished working up. On 19 July 1941 he announced that 'in the North and West all three branches of the Armed Forces must bear in mind the question of possible English attacks against the Channel Islands and the Norwegian coast'. The measures ordered in March, however, were a direct reaction to the British raid on the Lofoten Islands on 4 March; the announcement of July was a matter of ordinary precaution in connection with the launching of the attack on Russia. It was not until the autumn of 1941 that Hitler's anxiety for Norway became serious; but then it became as serious as it was inexplicable.

On 17 September he suggested that the battle-cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, then in Brest, should be moved to Norway

¹ *N.D.*, 556-2-PS.

'in order to defend the Northern area'. Raeder disliked this proposal; on 13 November, while agreeing that the *Tirpitz* should not be sent to the Atlantic 'because of the need of her presence in the Northern area', he proposed that the pocket battleship *Admiral Scheer* and the battle-cruisers at Brest should be sent to the Atlantic on commerce-raiding cruises. Hitler refused to give a decision. Instead, he ordered Raeder to look into the possibility, for the battle-cruisers, of a dash through the Channel; he thought he would also decide to send the *Scheer* to Norway. The reason for this attitude was his belief that 'the vital point at present is in the Norwegian Sea'.

If this was his view before the American entry into the War, his fear for Norway became an obsession when that development occurred. On no other evidence, apparently, than the earlier Lofoten raid, he became convinced that Norway would be attacked in the near future. On 29 December 1941 he was sure that, 'if the British go about things properly, they will attack Northern Norway at several points'; he was certain that 'by means of an all-out attack with their fleet and landing troops they will try to displace us there, take Narvik if possible, and thus exert pressure on Sweden and Finland'. 'This', he added, 'might be decisive for the War. The German Fleet must therefore use all its forces for the defence of Norway. It would be expedient to transfer all battleships and pocket battleships there for this purpose.' On 12 January 1942 he was more than ever sure that 'there will be a large-scale British-Russian offensive in Norway'; by 22 January his anxiety had become so great as to make him hysterical. He was 'thoroughly convinced that Britain and the U.S.A. intend to influence the course of the War by an attack on Northern Norway'; 'deeply concerned about the grave consequences which unfavourable developments in this area could have'; satisfied that 'Norway is the zone of destiny in this War'. He would 'expose the intentions of Britain and the United States, as well as Sweden, in the world press'. He 'demands unconditional surrender to all his commands and wishes concerning the defence of this area'; and his commands and wishes were issued at last.

He ordered reinforcement of Army personnel and material; 'even more of the heaviest artillery pieces are to be mounted in Norway'. Goering was instructed to increase the air forces in spite of his warning that aircraft were short and the Norwegian airfields already all too few. 'The Führer demands that every available vessel be employed in Norway, battleships, pocket battleships, heavy cruisers, light naval forces and E-boats.' He 'increases his demand for U-boats there'. In order to get them to Norway as soon as possible, he insisted that the *Gneisenau* and the *Scharnhorst*, which had been in Brest since March 1941, and the cruiser *Eugen*, in Brest since June 1941, should attempt the Channel passage, despite the fact that Raeder, on 12 January, had refused 'to take the initiative in advocating such a break-through operation'. He decided that the *Tirpitz*, whose move to Norway had long been intended but often postponed, should transfer to Trondhjem at once; that the *Scheer* should follow her; that every other heavy ship should move to Norway as soon as possible. The Navy was instructed to do 'everything in its power to head off the British offensive at the very outset. . . , foregoing all other warfare except the Mediterranean fighting'.

If necessary, even the Mediterranean would be sacrificed to this new danger; his final statement on 22 January was that he was determined to appoint Kesselring, then in charge in the Mediterranean, Commander of the Armed Forces in Norway when the threat materialised.

For the rest of the year, in spite of serious diversions elsewhere, Hitler's fear for Norway remained sufficiently alive to make him insist that the whole fleet, however inadequate it might prove in the event, should move to Norway as the ships became available, and that it should stay in Norwegian bases. The three ships from Brest made the passage to Germany on 11 and 12 February. The *Eugen* proceeded to Norway at the end of that month, but was torpedoed and damaged en route. The cruiser *Hipper* followed in March, the pocket battleships *Scheer* and *Lützow* in May, the cruisers *Köln* and *Nürnberg* by November, and the *Scharnhorst* in

January 1943, when the *Eugen* also returned to Norway. On 26 August 1942, when Raeder proposed that the *Scheer* should operate in the Atlantic in the coming winter, he refused his permission, expounding 'at length why he wishes to keep all larger units for operations in the North until further notice: they discourage landing attempts; the coast is insufficiently fortified'. And his fears for this area were not even allayed by the Allied landings in North-West Africa.

On 19 November 1942, a week after those landings, he confessed that 'all available reports still lead him to fear that the enemy will attempt an invasion during the Arctic night and that Sweden's attitude cannot be depended on'. On 22 December 1942, he considered that 'the danger of a possible Allied invasion of Norway is greater in January'. It emerged on the same day that he had ordered the first eight converted artillery barges to be sent to Norway: they had not been sent before because of the great increase in enemy attacks on German coastal shipping in the Channel. At the same meeting he insisted that it must at all times remain possible to reinforce the U-boats in Norway at short notice.

IV

It was the second British offensive in the Western Desert, coming on the top of the failure to defeat Russia by the end of 1941, that had finally destroyed Hitler's complacency about the Mediterranean. At the beginning of 1941 he could contemplate the loss of North Africa with confidence: 'the situation in Europe can no longer develop unfavourably for Germany even if we should lose the whole of North Africa'. By August 1941 he had come to see that 'the surrender of North Africa would be a great loss to us and to the Italians'. In the second half of that year he was driven to desperate, if inadequate, measures to defend it. Finally, the second Western Desert offensive, coming so soon upon the conclusion that Russia would not collapse that year, forced his hand, forced him to concede, for the first time, a major importance to Mediterranean operations.

Yet he continued to regard them as essentially holding operations. Even when Rommel halted his retreat of the past two months on 21 January 1942, and, by counter-attacking, revealed the continued weakness of the British position in that area, Hitler's attitude to the Mediterranean remained as defensive as it had always been. In eight days the Afrika Korps was back in Benghazi; its advance continued unchecked as far as Tobruk; and this was a turn in German fortunes which, coinciding with the Japanese advance in South-East Asia, reopened, at least for Raeder, the whole question of Germany's Mediterranean strategy. For Hitler, on the other hand, Rommel's success coincided with his desperate anxiety in the West, and particularly in Norway. Raeder might argue that opportunity, once previously overlooked, was offering for a second time; Hitler had new reasons for thinking that, once again, it should not be seized.

Raeder was not slow to rise to the occasion. On 13 February he pointed out that not a single heavy British ship in the Mediterranean was fully sea-worthy,¹ that 'the Axis rules both sea and air in the Central Mediterranean', that 'the Mediterranean situation is definitely favourable at the moment'. There would be enormous possibilities, in conjunction with the Japanese advance, if Germany were to launch an attack on Egypt and Suez as quickly as possible.

Rangoon, Singapore and probably Port Darwin will be in Japanese hands in a few weeks. . . . Japan plans to capture the key position of Ceylon. . . . The British will be forced to resort to heavily escorted convoys if they desire to maintain communication with India and the Near East. . . . The Suez and Basra positions are the western pillars of the British position in the Indian Ocean. Should these positions collapse under the weight of concentrated Axis pressure, the consequences for the British Empire would be disastrous. . . . The Japanese, for their

¹ This was correct. H.M.S. *Barham* was sunk on 25 November 1941; *Valiant* and *Queen Elizabeth* were severely damaged by Italian midget submarines on 19 December 1941. When these losses were followed by the mining of the Malta squadron, including H.M. cruisers *Neptune*, *Arethusa* and *Penelope*, the Mediterranean Fleet was left with only three effective ships above destroyer size: H.M. cruisers *Dido*, *Naiad* and *Euryalus*.

part, are making an honest effort to establish contact with Germany by sea and air. . . .

The least that Germany could do in return was to realise that 'an early Italo-German attack on the British key position of Suez would be of utmost strategic importance'. A month later, on 12 March, he urged that

the drive for the Suez Canal, if at all feasible, should be launched *this year*. The favourable situation in the Mediterranean, so pronounced at present, will probably *never occur again*. . . . The problem of shipping space required *can be solved*. . . . The Naval Staff thinks it desirable that the Führer should order preparations for an offensive against Suez to be begun.

On the same day he returned to the problem of Malta. It had not been discussed on this level since March 1941. It had since been relegated as a project to the Italian Command, and Mussolini was planning the capture of the island and keeping Hitler informed of the state of the plans. Raeder now urged that German interest in the operation should be revived. 'Advantage should be taken of the present state of the defences, greatly weakened by German air attacks.' The German Air Force and Army should give the Italians their full support in securing its early occupation.

In Raeder's opinion, Germany should also help the Japanese advance in the Indian Ocean by putting pressure on France about Madagascar. 'The Japanese', he added on 12 March, 'have recognised the great strategic importance of Madagascar. . . . They are planning to establish bases there as well as in Ceylon, in order to be able to cripple sea traffic in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea.' But Madagascar was French, France was regarded as a satellite of Germany, and it was therefore Germany's task to influence the French opinion in this matter.

Hitler's first reaction to all these suggestions was non-committal. On 13 February he made no comment on Raeder's appeal. On 12 March his only remark about Madagascar was that, in his opinion, 'France will not give her consent'. He was, on this occasion, 'inclined to undertake an offensive against Suez'—but only 'if the

Air Force can remain intact in the Mediterranean'. He might have to transfer it, however, to meet demands on other fronts; and it was danger in Norway, as well as the needs of the Russian front, that he now had in mind. 'If the Air Force is used elsewhere, the offensive cannot be carried out.' As for Malta, its capture would 'greatly facilitate a Suez offensive' and he would certainly allow the German Air Force to participate; but, apart from the fact that he was undecided about the Suez offensive, the Malta operation was in Mussolini's hands and Hitler was 'afraid that the operation, evidently scheduled for July, will again be postponed'. He promised however, to discuss Raeder's points with Mussolini.

In the next few weeks Raeder's argument in favour of the capture of Malta was supported by Kesselring, and by the Italians themselves, to such an extent that Hitler gave his consent to German participation in the plan. Increased air attacks took place from 1 April as a preliminary to Malta's capture; on 12 April Kesselring reported that the Italians intended to launch the main attack about the end of May. With the Italians for once apparently determined, with Rommel well placed in North Africa, Hitler seemed to be impressed at last with the chance of victory in the Mediterranean. At a meeting with Mussolini at the end of April he agreed to send two parachute battalions and other reinforcements to Rommel at once; he approved an increase in the German forces for the assault on Malta. The German naval representative at the meeting was 'glad to see the increased interest displayed by the Führer in this important area and the consequent intensification of German fighting spirit there. The whole business is now assuming importance after having been regarded hitherto as a subsidiary matter in which victories were looked on as gifts from Heaven, but in which nobody bothered to do anything.'

There was, however, one decision taken at the Hitler-Mussolini meeting which was regarded by this authority as 'not a welcome move'. This was the postponement of the Malta operation from the end of May to mid-July: the plan arranged by Hitler was that Rommel should take Tobruk and complete the capture of Libya

in the beginning of June, that the attack on Malta should follow in mid-July, and that Rommel should then advance into the Nile Delta.

Further disappointments were soon to follow. Rommel was held at Tobruk until the third week in June; Hitler changed his mind about the capture of Malta. He explained his reason for this sudden change of front on 15 June. While recognising that it was important to capture Malta, 'he does not believe that this can be done while the offensive on the Eastern front is in progress; during that time the Air Force cannot spare any transport planes'. In any case, he did not rate high the chances of success, 'especially with Italian troops'.

It is obvious that both these considerations must have been in Hitler's mind at the end of April, when he agreed to carry out the operation: the over-riding claims of other fronts had made him reluctant to accept Raeder's argument on 12 March; his distrust of Italy was long-standing and deep. He produced, it is true, as another reason for delaying the operation, the argument that, once Tobruk had fallen, most Axis supplies to North Africa would be routed from Crete, beyond the range of Malta's attack. But this was also a poor argument in view of the fact that not even he denied that the capture of Malta would still be of the greatest value. Some other factor must have intervened—possibly the delay before Tobruk—to induce him to withdraw from the position he had temporarily taken up. Whatever that may have been, it was less important than the fact that he had accepted the operation reluctantly and against his better judgment in the first place. He had never liked the idea of air-borne operations over the sea. He had refused to consider the capture of Malta in 1941; the subsequent capture of Crete, for which he overcame his dislike, entailed heavy losses which strengthened his original opinion. The real reason for the cancellation of the Malta plan in 1942 is indicated, not in the reasons he gave for his decision, but in another remark he made on 15 June. 'Once Malta has been bled white by the continuous air-raids and the total blockade we could risk the attack.'

He preferred to wait, to put all his Mediterranean hopes—for he now had them¹—on Rommel's advance into Egypt. And the rapidity of that advance after the fall of Tobruk, reaching Bardia on 22 June, Sollum on 23 June, Mersa Matruh on 28 June, El Alamein on 30 June—this and Rommel's confidence that he would take Suez at last, only strengthened Hitler's determination to put off the capture of Malta until the conquest of Egypt was complete. For, once again, the Suez Canal seemed almost in Rommel's grasp; it seemed that not only the fate of Malta but the future of the Mediterranean and the control of the Middle East would be decided by the movement of his troops.

Kesselring deplored the Malta decision; Raeder stated bluntly on 26 August that 'the opinion of the Naval Staff regarding the importance of capturing Malta remains unaltered'; but all the protests were in vain.² The subject was never seriously discussed again; the opportunity never recurred; Rommel, held at Alamein, was robbed once more of Egypt and Suez. The siege of Malta was relieved by the arrival of supply ships in August; Malta once more played its part in preparing for an offensive by the Eighth Army; and this further offensive, beginning with the battle of El Alamein from 23 October to 4 November, was the final campaign in the Western Desert. It was timed to coincide with the landings in North-West Africa by which, at last, the Allies assumed the offensive in the Second World War.

¹ But not to the extent that would justify Halder's criticism in *Hitler as War Lord* (Putnam, 1950), where (p. 36) he writes: 'It was characteristic of Hitler's strategic thinking that under the influence of Rommel's successes he completely lost sight of this policy [of accepting that a decisive victory over Great Britain in North Africa was impossible]. He was soon indulging in extravagant visions of a conquest of Egypt, of a bid for the Suez Canal and later even of a junction with the Japanese through the Red Sea.' It is, of course, another question whether Halder, wrong in arguing that Hitler was so carried away in 1942, is not also wrong in arguing that these objectives were impossible at an earlier date.

² For further evidence that the postponement of the Malta plan was a decision taken by Hitler and Rommel, and that 'it was also opposed by Jodl and the Italian Supreme Command', see the letter of Frau Jodl in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 September, 1950.

V

In the Battle of the Atlantic, as in the Far East, America's entry into the War was the occasion of immediate setbacks for the Allies, as well as a guarantee of Germany's eventual defeat. U-boats were at once directed to the American east coast, which they reached in the middle of January 1942; the United States were unprepared for their attack. No convoy system existed for the enormous volume of shipping in this area; none that was at all effective was introduced until the following July. The U-boats found there an easier and far more profitable field than the East and Central North Atlantic, where the convoy system and the improvement of British anti-U-boat measures, particularly aircraft and radar, had slowly increased their difficulties and limited their successes. No less than 250 ships were sunk within sight of the American east coast between the middle of January and the end of July.

The opportunity for sinkings on this scale in the American area was not the only advantage enjoyed by the U-boat Command in this year which saw the peak of its successes. Earlier U-boat building over more than two years of war, in which period, whatever the obstacles, output had slowly increased, was having a noticeable effect on the number of U-boats available. Compared with the still surprisingly low figure of 15 in April 1941, there were 63 U-boats at sea in April 1942, apart from those in the Mediterranean. Of these, 47 were in the Atlantic and 14 in Arctic waters. There were 70 in the Atlantic alone in the following June, 92 in the following November,¹ when the number at last reached the figure which Doenitz, at the beginning of the War, had estimated as the minimum required for victory over Great Britain. Among the U-boats becoming operational growing numbers were of the bigger type of 750 tons, with a longer range than those with which Germany had fought the War in the first two years.

¹ These figures include U-boats on passage to or from operational areas.

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Not a few were of 1000 tons; and both these types were able to operate in distant areas, in the South Atlantic as well as off the American coast, beyond the range of the Allied defences. Except for the North Atlantic convoy area, which was comparatively immune, all areas which the U-boats could reach, and not only the American coast, saw an increase in sinkings proportionate to the greater range and the growing number of U-boats at sea. In all areas in the first seven months of 1942, 495 ships of more than two and a half million tons, including 142 tankers, were sunk by U-boats; and a further 108 ships were sunk in August.

If anything, the U-boat Command over-estimated its successes, claiming 303 ships sunk, of 2,015,000 tons, including 112 tankers, between the middle of January and the middle of May; and, in face of these figures and on account of the state of affairs on other fronts, Hitler at last became co-operative in the matter of U-boat construction. From the beginning of 1942 onwards, he showed more than his earlier casual interest in U-boat operations. On 3 January he told the Japanese Ambassador that his 'most important task is to get the U-boat war going in full swing'. 'We are fighting', he added, 'for existence, and our attitude cannot be ruled by humane feelings'; and this remark was the beginning of his agitation for the policy of attacking merchant ships with the object of killing the crews.¹

After February 1942 there were no more complaints from Raeder that construction was being delayed. On 13 April Hitler agreed that 'victory depends on destroying the greatest amount of Allied shipping possible'. On 14 May, as a further illustration of Hitler's new interest, Doenitz, the Flag Officer for U-boats, attended the Hitler-Raeder conferences for the first time to discuss the U-boat campaign.² On 15 June, when Raeder demanded specific orders to

¹ *N.D.*, 423-D. For the policy of killing crews see *N.D.*, 630-D, 642-D and 663-D.

² Doenitz had once previously attended these conferences, on 17 September 1941, but that meeting had been a special one to discuss the problem of avoiding incidents with the U.S.A. in the Atlantic. 14 May 1942 was the first time Doenitz attended to discuss the U-boat offensive.

the effect that no workmen engaged in U-boat construction or repair should be drafted into the Armed Forces, Hitler at once directed the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces to meet Raeder's request, on the grounds that 'the U-boats will in the end decide the outcome of the War'. On 26 August he recognised 'the need for the best possible aircraft to support the U-boats. . .', as well as the wisdom of Raeder's request that air attacks against England should be concentrated on ships in port or under construction. On 28 September—unprecedented step—he summoned a special conference because 'he wishes to be informed about the present state of the U-boat war; he likewise wishes to form an opinion regarding the degree to which it is keeping pace with the further demands of the War'. To every suggestion aimed at increasing the efforts in the Battle of the Atlantic Hitler's reaction was now favourable.

The situation had gone too far, however, for Hitler's support to have startling results. More than 300 U-boats, it is true, were completed in 1942; but in a more vital matter than numbers available, in the matter of improving the operational efficiency of the U-boat, which was now the only way of defeating the Allies in the Atlantic, he had left things too late. He could recognise, for example, on 26 August, the need for the best possible aircraft to support the U-boats and attack ships in British ports. But he could 'make no definite promises'; he was bound to 'stress the strong defences of enemy harbours'; and at the end of September Doenitz was still reporting 'the need for aircraft to support the U-boats to a much greater extent than has been the case up to the present time'.

More important than the lack of resources was the fact that the objective of the U-boat Command had shifted significantly in a defensive direction from the moment the United States entered the War. Its aim, at the outset, had been 'to defeat England in war', to force her to ask for terms by cutting off her imports; it had ceased to be so simple or so ambitious by the beginning of 1942. 'Victory depends', declared Hitler on 13 April, 'on destroying the greatest amount of Allied tonnage possible'; but what he meant was rather that defeat might thereby be avoided. For, he added,

'all offensive operations of the enemy can thus be slowed down or even stopped entirely'. A month later, when he attended Hitler's conference on 14 May, Doenitz felt it necessary to justify the concentration of the U-boats on the American east coast. They could hardly be said to be besieging England; they were not cutting off British imports. But 'American and British ships are under unified command. . . ; we must sink ships wherever the greatest number can be sunk at lowest cost to us. . . ; from the point of view of operational cost our U-boat operations in the American area are justified'.

At that time, it is true, it did not seem impossible to Hitler and his advisers that Germany could force a stalemate with the U-boat campaign. On 13 February Raeder calculated that total Allied shipbuilding in 1942 would be 7,000,000 tons and that the U-boats need only sink 600,000 tons a month to keep level. Hitler could hope on 13 April that 'all offensive operations of the enemy can be slowed down or even stopped entirely'. On 14 May Doenitz concluded his survey with these words: 'I do not believe that the race between enemy shipbuilding and U-boat sinkings is in any way hopeless.' He was forced to warn his superiors that 'one of these days the situation in the American zone will change; even now everything points to the fact that the Americans are making strenuous efforts to prevent the large numbers of sinkings'. But he could still hope that, even when the American area became unprofitable, the outlook would still be promising 'on account of the large numbers of U-boats soon to be available' and because of the introduction of new technical devices, particularly of non-contact torpedoes.

This hope was soon to be belied. On 26 August Raeder had to announce, not only that 'the enemy transport system in U.S. waters had undergone great changes, as the Naval Staff predicted and expected even sooner, as a result of the introduction of convoys', but that three other unfavourable developments could also be discerned. 'U-boats in mid-Atlantic', he went on, 'are effective so long as convoys remain outside the range of aircraft

protection, but this is increasing'; 'recently our U-boats have suffered heavy losses because of the superior locating devices [radar] of British aircraft'; and, thirdly, the appearance of strong enemy air forces in the Bay of Biscay was leading to further losses and imposing great delays on U-boats on passage.

There was no rapid falling off in the U-boat successes when the American coast was rendered unsafe for them in July: 108 ships were sunk in all areas in August, 98 in September, 93 in October, 117 in November—the worst month, from the point of view of tonnage sunk, of the entire War. In 1942 as a whole the U-boats sank $6\frac{1}{4}$ million gross tons, nearly 3 times the figure for 1941. But the accuracy of Raeder's warning was adequately reflected in U-boat losses, which were startling from July onwards. Up to the middle of August 1942, according to Raeder's calculation on 24 August, the average monthly loss of U-boats since the beginning of the War was just under 3; and only 3 were sunk in June 1942. But 17 were sunk in July, 12 in August, 12 in September, 13 in October, 15 in November.

It was this untoward trend in the figures of U-boats losses which induced Hitler to summon the special conference of 28 September to discuss the U-boat war and to enable him 'to form an opinion as to the extent to which it was keeping pace with the present demands of the War'. He opened the meeting by expressing his 'great appreciation for the achievements of the U-boats'; he announced his firm conviction that 'the monthly rate of sinkings will continue to be so high that the enemy will not be able to replace his losses by new construction'. He thought it 'impossible that the increase in production in enemy shipyards comes anywhere near what propaganda would have us believe'. But the subsequent review of the situation by Doenitz was gloomy in the extreme.

Although there were still a few 'soft spots', all convoys were so strongly protected that it was difficult for the U-boats even to approach them, while the increasing numbers and range of Allied aircraft, 'the great menace of the U-boat to-day', was steadily

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reducing the areas in which they could operate without loss. It was this fact, and not the attack on convoys, which was responsible for the heavy U-boat losses. If these losses were to be avoided, it was essential that the U-boats should themselves be supported by aircraft, and that the emphasis should be put on technical improvements. Improved radar interception and deception might outwit the aircraft for a time; acoustic homing torpedoes were being developed which might enable the U-boats to eliminate escort vessels from a distance. But these measures would take time to perfect; and they could be expected to provide only temporary relief. What was really needed in the new situation was the revolutionary development of a completely new U-boat with high under-water speed. This was already in the experimental stage; but would take even longer to produce.

Hitler was 'entirely in harmony with these plans'; he referred again to his new found conviction that 'the U-boat plays a decisive role in the outcome of the War'. But that conviction had formed too late. Doenitz's forebodings were soon to be amply justified. The new U-boats,¹ which became so important among Hitler's hopes in 1943, were never to operate; within a few weeks, the landings in North-West Africa were to show how unlikely it was that the Allies would wait for such plans to mature or for Hitler to retrieve his mistakes.

That these landings could be launched at all, or at least so soon after the United States had joined forces with Great Britain, was due to the fact that Germany, having failed in the attempt to invade England, having failed to exploit the Middle East, also failed in the subsequent attempt to dominate the trade-routes with the U-boats. Nothing less than a different pre-war policy and the possession of a sizeable fleet on the outbreak of war could have enabled Hitler to snatch success in the Battle of Britain; in the struggle for the Middle East, victory was made impossible by the decision to attack Russia; in the Battle of the Atlantic, where victory might have been achieved if the U-boat effort had

¹ See Appendix C.

been made in time, the effort was made too late. It reached its peak when the opportunity had passed by.

VI

Until the middle of 1941, Raeder had steadily foreseen the danger of an Anglo-American landing in North-West Africa; Hitler, under Raeder's constant pressure, had come to accept it as a threat, but as one which, short of preventing the American entry into the War, he could neither reduce nor avert. So fixed was Hitler's attitude, and so confirmed by the facts, especially after the opening of the Eastern campaign, that the subject was exhausted between the two men by August 1941. If there was nothing more to be done, even Raeder concluded that there was nothing more to be said. After August 1941, North-West Africa was not discussed until the United States entered the War.

After Pearl Harbour Raeder chose to believe that the threat to this area was no longer imminent. 'The U.S.,' he declared on 12 December 1941, 'will have to concentrate all her strength in the Pacific during the next few months; Britain will not want to run any risks; it is hardly likely that the transport tonnage is available for such occupation tasks.' Hitler, on the other hand, as is clear from the minutes of the meeting of that date, suspected that the Allies would 'take steps in the near future to occupy the Azores, the Canaries, and perhaps even to attack Dakar', in preparation for an invasion of North-West Africa.

For the next six months Hitler's anxiety on this score was subordinated to the consideration of—for him—more serious dangers in Norway; yet it was obviously greater than Raeder's. On 15 June 1942, when the subject was next raised, it was Hitler who raised it. He suddenly proposed that a group of U-boats should be held permanently in readiness against any attempt by the Allies to strike against the Azores, Madeira or the Cape Verdes; for it was still his mistaken conviction that, because Germany would have had to take these islands before capturing Gibraltar,

the United States and Great Britain would be unable to attack the African mainland without first seizing the Atlantic islands. When Raeder objected that 'we cannot afford to divert a considerable number of U-boats for such a purpose alone', Hitler abandoned his proposal. This incident can have done nothing to relieve the defeatism with which he already contemplated the danger of an attack on North-West Africa. No small amount of his apparently greater anxiety for Norway was due, paradoxically enough, to the fact that the defence of Norway was something he could do something about. For the defence of North-West Africa he could now do nothing; and he knew it.

Raeder had always refused to accept this view. As late as 12 December 1941, though convinced that enemy action was no longer imminent, he had pressed for the seizure of Dakar, 'which would be valuable for the Battle of the Atlantic', and announced that 'the Naval Staff, now as always, is in favour of consolidating the French position in North-West Africa'. But these proposals, sound enough until the attack on Russia, had lost all touch with reality after the failure to defeat Russia in a rapid campaign, and certainly when this was followed by the American entry into the War. In due course he came to realise this himself. It was he who next mentioned the subject on 26 August 1942. He reminded Hitler that the capture of Gibraltar 'remains the most desirable objective', but he added: 'for the future'. More important still, although 'he continued to regard a possible attempt of the Anglo-Saxons to occupy North-West Africa, and get a foothold with the aid of the French, as a very great danger to the whole German war effort', he implied that he, like Hitler, had at last concluded that nothing could be done to forestall it.

For he spoke of the consequences of a successful Allied landing, and anticipated that the Allies would then turn on Italy and destroy the German position in North-East Africa; but his sole recommendation was that 'Germany must maintain a strong position in the Mediterranean and must above all have unquestionable domination over Crete, and cannot afford to relinquish Piraeus

and Salonika'. If this meant anything, it meant that Raeder accepted as inevitable a successful Allied occupation of North-West Africa, the loss by Germany of North Africa, perhaps the defeat of Italy. And Hitler saw eye to eye with Raeder. He 'did not conceal his dissatisfaction with the Italians', and he had no intention of giving up Crete 'for the present'.

The Allied occupation of North-West Africa, which Hitler and Raeder never discussed again, which both had come to regard as unavoidable, began on 8 November 1942, and was virtually unopposed. Combined with the final Western Desert offensive, which reached Benghazi by 22 November, it soon made Tunisia the last Axis foothold in North Africa, and it led, in due course, to the total defeat of the German and Italian Armies in that area.

CHAPTER XI

THE END OF THE GERMAN SURFACE FLEET, JANUARY 1943

I

THE year 1942, beginning with Hitler's order that the surface fleet should be concentrated in Norway, ended with an event which led him to order its immediate dissolution. There were transitions more serious than this in that year which saw the turning of the tide. The Japanese offensive faltered and was stopped; Rommel was halted, and forced back from Alamein; the Allies began their series of major offensives with the landings in North-West Africa; the U-boats reached and passed the peak of their successes, entering the decline from which they never recovered. But nothing is more illustrative of the shift that was taking place than the relatively insignificant question of the German Fleet; for that question throws a clearer light on Hitler's state of mind than these more important developments.

The German surface fleet, so small at the beginning of the War, had escaped Hitler's attention for the first two years. Until he developed his fear for Norway in the autumn of 1941, he had left Raeder quite free to make the best possible use of the few ships at his disposal; and Raeder had used them to good effect. The completion of the few ships under construction was frequently delayed; some of Hitler's remarks had suggested that, in a crisis, his attitude to the surface fleet would be hostile. On 16 September 1939 he had confessed that 'the *Bismarck*, the *Tirpitz* and the two heavy cruisers will not yield very much'. On 10 October 1939 he had wondered if it was 'really necessary' to complete the *Graf Zeppelin*, Germany's only aircraft-carrier. But the delay in completing the

ships on the stocks was never a bone of contention, and there was no crisis affecting the fleet before the end of 1942. After the loss of the *Graf Spee* in 1939 there were, it is true, mutterings from Hitler. After the loss of the *Bismarck* on 27 May 1941 he reacted in the same way, wondering, on 6 June, why the ship 'did not rely on her fighting strength and attack the *Prince of Wales* in order to destroy her after the *Hood* had been sunk'. Yet, although even Raeder, after the loss of the *Bismarck*, admitted that 'the effectiveness of surface ships is limited by their small numbers', Hitler approved Raeder's restatement of the classical policy and his intention to keep following it despite the *Bismarck's* experience.

In spite of their small numbers, said Raeder on that date, the surface ships

are carrying out decisive offensive warfare against merchant ships, which is the only way to conquer Britain. . . . It is possible that they will gradually be destroyed. This possibility, however, must not be allowed to keep surface ships from continuing to operate. . . . The fact that they are operating, or even the possibility that they will appear in the Atlantic, supports U-boat warfare to a great degree. The British are obliged to protect their convoys with strong forces. If these forces were free they could operate with disturbing effect at other places. . . . The British would also be able to strengthen their anti-U-boat defences at the expense of the fleet escort forces. For these reasons, it is urgently necessary to maintain and operate the small German surface fleet.

Hitler agreed with these views; he went even further, ordering that the cruiser *Seydlitz* and the aircraft-carrier *Graf Zeppelin*, two uncompleted ships whose future had been in doubt for some time, should be finished when Russia was defeated.

II

Less than two months later he began to be seriously worried about the defence of Norway. In the new year, after the American entry into the War, Raeder still argued that, 'basically, the idea of using these ships to wage war against merchant shipping in the Atlantic is a good one', but he was overruled. The battle-cruisers

THE LIMITATIONS IMPOSED ON THE FLEET

were ordered through the Channel in the interests of the defence of Norway; all other available heavy ships were despatched to the Norwegian area; and, except from Norway against the convoys to North Russia, the German surface fleet never operated again.

It was not only the fear for Norway, however, which imposed this limitation on the use of the surface ships. As early as 13 November 1941, in connection with the movement of the *Tirpitz* to Trondhjem, Raeder had admitted that, apart from the need for her presence in Norway, she could not be sent into the Atlantic, as previously intended, 'because of the general oil situation and the enemy situation'. The enemy situation, after the loss of the *Bismarck*, speaks for itself, though Raeder had once been inclined to accept the increased risk. The oil situation, however, had developed into something which he could not ignore. The blockade was beginning to work.

On 13 November 1941 he calculated that, with stocks at 380,000 tons, future monthly supplies, at 57,000 tons, would fall short by 34,000 tons of the monthly amount required for normal operations; and the situation was worse than these figures would suggest because Germany was also expected to meet the needs of the Italian Navy. He announced at the same time that, 'in full consideration of the very difficult oil situation', the Naval Staff had decided that, even if the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* did move into the Atlantic, instead of through the Channel to home ports, 'no lengthy operations against merchant vessels are to be undertaken'. A month later the oil position was even worse; according to Raeder on 12 December 1941, it was 'very critical'.¹ Not only had the Navy's requirements been cut by 50 per cent, causing 'an intolerable restriction of the mobility of our vessels'; Italian demands on German stocks had also increased, and Roumanian exports to Germany and Italy had ceased for financial reasons.

In 1942 the oil problem became worse still. By 1 April the stocks of the German Navy had run down to 150,000 tons, a

¹ Diesel oil, which was used by U-boats and the pocket battleships, was not yet in short supply.

END OF THE GERMAN SURFACE FLEET

figure which should be compared with the fact that 20,000 tons had been consumed in the move of the Brest group through the Channel and of the *Eugen* to Norway. Roumanian deliveries had been resumed; but they were running at only 8,000 tons a month compared with the earlier 460,000 tons; and this supply was promised entirely to Italy. The total allocation for both the German and Italian Navies, whose requirements had been calculated at 100,000 tons each in November 1941, were cut in April 1942 from 97,000 to 61,000 tons. On 15 June Raeder was forced to demand that no further supplies should be made to Italy; and Hitler accepted this. But sheer necessity forced the handing over of increasing amounts for Mediterranean operations later in the year. By 19 November even the Arctic movements of German ships based in Norway were hampered by the lack of oil. By 22 December ships could only be refuelled by hand to mouth methods, and Raeder, expecting further large demands from Italy, warned that the situation would become even worse.

Thus, even if the surface fleet had not been tied up on Norway, its operations against the trade routes would have been strictly limited, apart altogether from the greater risks involved after the entry of the United States into the War.

In another direction, moreover, Hitler's fear for Norway increased his interest in the surface fleet and induced him to subscribe to ideas which favoured the fleet, and which were near to Raeder's heart. On 13 November 1941 Raeder was still doubtful whether work should continue on the aircraft-carrier, *Graf Zeppelin*, as he thought that aircraft for it would not be ready till the end of 1944, even under the most favourable circumstances. Hitler, however, wanted the work to continue and was confident that the Air Force could provide aircraft at an earlier date. On 12 March 1942 Raeder demanded that this work should be accelerated and that the Air Force in Norway should be further reinforced. A recent sortie by the *Tirpitz* against an Arctic convoy, in which she narrowly escaped being torpedoed by carrier aircraft, had convinced him of the weakness of his forces in relation to the British Fleet, of the

danger, in particular, from enemy aircraft-carriers, and of the need for carrier- and shore-based air support if German operations were to succeed and Norway was to be defended. Hitler had drawn the same conclusion; he ordered increased air support for the fleet; he also felt that the aircraft-carrier was urgently needed. On 13 April, however, it was clear that it could not be ready for operations before the winter of 1943, and on 13 May he therefore decided on the immediate conversion of four large merchant vessels into auxiliary carriers. 'The Führer considers it entirely out of the question for larger surface forces to operate without aircraft protection.' The conversion of the *Seydlitz* was also considered, but Raeder reported against this after an investigation.

III

Hitler's concern was not, of course, for the fleet; it was for Norway and for the inability of the fleet to defend it. His fear for Norway continued throughout 1942, becoming less intense, perhaps, with the passage of time; his conviction that the ships would be unable to serve their major purpose, the defence of Norway against the invasion, had grown since the *Tirpitz* sortie, especially as the converted aircraft-carriers could not be ready for a year. And it was against this background that the following incident took place. On 31 December 1942 the *Hipper*, the *Lützow* and six destroyers, attacking a Russia-bound convoy, were thwarted by the escorting forces under H.M.S. *Onslow* and quickly broke off the action after the loss of one destroyer. The news of this action was not improved by the fact that, owing to a breakdown of German communications, Hitler first received it from an English broadcast. The German ships had been under orders to avoid all serious action; but Hitler felt that his suspicions about the fighting qualities of the fleet and its ability to defend Norway had been confirmed. His anger was immense.

On 6 January 1943, at his next meeting with Raeder, he talked, according to Raeder's minutes, 'for an hour and a half about the

role of the Prussian and German Navies since they came into existence'. 'The High Seas Fleet', he declared, 'made no notable contribution during the World War. It is customary to blame the Kaiser . . . but the real reason was that the Navy lacked men of action. . . . The revolution and the scuttling of the fleet at Scapa Flow do not redound to the credit of the German Navy.' The recent incident showed that things were unchanged; and he had decided that 'in the present critical situation . . . we cannot permit our large ships to ride idly at anchor for months. . . . In the case of an invasion of Norway our Air Force would be of more value in attacking an invasion fleet than in being obliged to protect our own fleet. The fleet would be of no great value in preventing the enemy from establishing a beach-head.' And, as he would not be 'removing a fighting unit which had retained its full usefulness', it should not be considered 'a degradation if he decides to scrap the large ships'.

Raeder was asked to investigate the following questions at once. Should the auxiliary aircraft-carriers already ordered be retained? Could the pocket battleships *Lützow* and *Scheer* be converted into aircraft-carriers? In which order should the other larger ships be decommissioned? Could the U-boat programme be extended and speeded up if the large ships were eliminated? 'U-boats constituted the most important branch in the last war and must be considered equally important to-day.' 'The Commander-in-Chief's comments will be of historical value. The Führer will carefully examine the document.'

Raeder's minutes record that he 'scarcely had an opportunity to comment'; but his final impression of the interview was that Hitler, though he had described his decision as final, would reconsider his views if sound arguments were presented. When Raeder returned with his memorandum he discovered that he had been mistaken in this; his written arguments in favour of retaining the fleet were ignored. On 30 January 1943, in consequence, he resigned the command which he had held since 1928, and was succeeded by Admiral Doenitz.

HITLER'S ATTITUDE TO THE WAR

Doenitz, the U-boat's advocate, at once set about the task of implementing Hitler's wishes concerning the surface ships, though even he considered Hitler's decision too drastic. On 26 February 1943 he persuaded a most reluctant Führer to permit the retention of the *Tirpitz*, the *Scharnhorst* and the *Lützow* as a task force for operations against Allied convoys to North Russia. But, with these exceptions, plans were drawn up, and soon put into effect, by which the surface fleet was paid off or turned into training ships for U-boat personnel.

IV

This incident was not important for itself or its consequences. Events had already outstripped the value of the German surface fleet; if it had continued in being, it would have done so, as did the remnants that remained in northern waters, to little purpose. Events had already gone too far for Raeder's advice, even if it had been heeded, to be of further use. But it throws some light on Hitler's state of mind at the beginning of 1943, and is important for that reason.

Much as he was given to ranting, especially in public and with sizeable audiences, he had never previously lost his head in the conferences with his Naval Commander-in-Chief. Never before, on the evidence of the minutes of these conferences, had he flown into a rage on these occasions, or used them for lectures in dubious history. Hitherto, if he had not often been disposed to heed Raeder's advice, he had at least always listened to his views. The violence of the meeting of 6 January 1943 is remarkable by contrast with the previous records.

The contrast is not difficult to explain. In a particular sense, his outburst was a characteristic and belated admission that he had been wrong to expect Allied landings in Norway. The landings in North-West Africa, and the consequent threat to Italy and the southern front, had left no doubt on this score; and if he had refused to recognise his mistake for some time, and if he still did

not openly admit it, the error was so obvious by the end of 1942 that he could now take his revenge on the fleet, which was no longer required for Norway's defence. But he had also made serious miscalculations elsewhere, and, more generally speaking, his action was the culmination of a series of disappointments spread over many months, and of their effect on his health and temperament.

He had fought the War for over three years; since taking over command of the Army on 19 December 1941 he had conducted it single-handed, living almost as a recluse, but feeling at the same time that he must interfere increasingly in the sphere of operations, as opposed to strategy, and in the details of affairs. But his greater efforts and his increased intervention had made no difference. In the past year, his fight had also been one against almost the whole world; since the previous summer, at least, the record had been one of uninterrupted adversity; and since the autumn the tide had turned unmistakably on every front. The Japanese offensives had shot their bolt. Rommel was retreating, Malta was triumphant, the Allies were in North-West Africa. The U-boats had made their greatest bid and begun to fail. In Russia the enemy was not only still fighting after a second summer; the Germans had been held at Stalingrad since August, the German offensive in the Caucasus had been halted in September, and on 19 November had begun the great Russian offensive which had forced the German Armies to flee the Caucasus at the end of December. It was now destroying the German forces at Stalingrad, and—despite his public promise that Stalingrad would be captured—was clearly leading to the final surrender of the city on 31 January. And it was then to continue for another six weeks into the Don country and the Ukraine.

The German fleet paid for all these reverses—for Stalingrad in particular—and for their combined effect on Hitler's state of mind, as well as for his miscalculations about the threat to Norway. For he was a physical and nervous wreck by the end of 1942; the first visible signs of physical deterioration became apparent early in

1943;¹ and if this was due to the overwork and nervous strain that was inevitable, given the length of the War and his method of conducting it, there can also be no doubt that, in the past few months, the process had been accelerated by the bitter knowledge of defeat. He might still refuse to admit the fact but, after the autumn of 1942, he knew that he had lost the War.

Even his occasional announcements of future intentions reveal the decline of his hopes, and testify to its rapidity from this time. His ambitions had been lowered from the moment the United States had entered the War. Out-and-out victory had been relinquished as an aim; stalemate and compromise with the Western Powers had become the most that could be hoped for. But he had thought it possible, for some months, that such a compromise would be achieved; and his aims had included, as the prerequisite for such a settlement, the defeat of Russia. On 26 August 1942 he and Raeder agreed that

the war situation continues to be dominated by the urgent necessity to defeat Russia and thus create a *Lebensraum* which is blockade-proof and easy to defend. Then we could continue to fight for years. The fight against the Anglo-Saxon sea-powers will decide the length and outcome of the War and could bring England and the United States to the point of discussing peace terms When Russia is defeated we must still fight the naval war against the Anglo-Saxons to the end, as the only way to bring them to terms.

As late as 19 November, within this framework, Hitler was still contemplating future offensives.

He desires that measures be taken against enemy shipping to Egypt and the Middle East via the Cape, in order to relieve the pressure on our troops in Africa and to facilitate a later advance to the Near East . . . ; the Führer also wants transport U-boats to be built because, since the Americans took over Iceland, he has again taken up the idea of a sudden invasion and the establishment of an air base there.

But this was the last occasion on which he talked of projects such as these. With the opening of the Russian offensive the Eastern front took on a different complexion. The Russians knew,

¹ H. R. Trevor-Roper, *The Last Days of Hitler*, pp. 61-77.

after the battle of Stalingrad, that the struggle for survival had been won and that the fight for liberation was beginning; and Hitler, who had hitherto stubbornly maintained that the Russians were at their last gasp,¹ must have known this too. He had already begun to consider, with great reluctance and no hope of success, peace negotiations with the Soviet Government, which Ribbentrop and others had been pressing on him for some time past,² and which were actually opened early in 1943, only to break down by the middle of the year.³ And if this indicates that he had abandoned all hope of Russia's military defeat, and that he had come to realise that, without some settlement with her, he would fail to reach a stalemate with the Western Powers, there was also much hopeless talk of peace offers to the West at this same time.⁴ But the rapid deterioration of affairs on other fronts was also a warning that this last resort might soon be destroyed. And he had already concluded, as he explained to Raeder on 22 December 1942, that 'he must first of all prevent a collapse on any front where the enemy could substantially injure home territory'.

In that remark of 22 December 1942 he defined what in fact became his only aim from the beginning of 1943 to the end of the War. To defend Fortress Germany against ever lengthening odds; to refuse retreat on any front until it became unavoidable, as the only method of ensuring Germany's defence; to prolong the struggle for as long as possible, even when the defence of Germany broke down—these were the only thoughts which guided him. He had no other strategy. No plan for the future sustained him in this policy; only the hope that Russia and the West would quarrel, that the old U-boats would recover the supremacy they had lost by the end of 1942, that the introduction of the new type of U-boat would save the situation, that other new weapons might yet avert defeat.

¹ Halder, *Hitler as War Lord*, p. 5.

² *Proceedings*, Part 10, pp. 201-2, and Maxime Mourin, *Les Tentatives de Paix*, 1939-45, pp. 140-4.

³ Rebecca West, *The Meaning of Treason*, pp. 158-9.

⁴ Mourin, pp. 144-7.

CHAPTER XII

HITLER'S STRATEGY IN DEFEAT

I

SUCH, by then, was the balance of forces in Germany's disfavour that these hopes proved vain in the event, and Hitler's policy produced only a continuous alternation between delay and further defeat for the remainder of the War.

He could insist that Tunisia, as he said on 19 November 1942, was 'a decisive key point'; he could determine to hold it at all costs; he could reinforce it so effectively that on 6 January 1943 General Eisenhower represented to the Allied Chiefs of Staff that 'unless this reinforcement can be materially and immediately reduced, the situation both here and in the Eighth Army area will deteriorate without doubt'. But, for all the appearance of near-success, the battle for Tunisia could be nothing more for Germany than a rearguard action, and this fact was recognised from the outset. The decision to fight on in North Africa was taken, as Raeder said on 19 November 1942, 'because the presence of the Axis in Tunisia compels the enemy to employ considerable forces; it prevents enemy success since the passage through the Mediterranean is denied him'.

The German supply position in Tunisia was rendered desperate by March 1943; and if this fact, which led to the final collapse of the Axis in North Africa on 7 May, was due to the vastly superior strategic position of the Allies, that superiority was partly the result of the continued failure of the U-boats in the Atlantic. 'The conquest of Tunisia by the enemy', declared Hitler on 14 March 1943, 'apart from leading to the loss of Italy, would mean a saving to him of 4 to 5 million tons of shipping, so that the U-boats would have to work for 4 to 5 months to effect equalisation.' This

statement not only confirmed the negative, rearguard nature of his purpose in hanging on; it exaggerated the current U-boat successes. Allied losses from U-boat attack had dropped to 336,000 tons in December 1942, to 200,000 tons in January 1943; and, though this figure rose again, at the end of the winter, to 627,000 tons in March, the months of April and May 1943 stand out as the period in which the offensive in the Battle of the Atlantic finally passed to the Allies. For there was a further drop in the tonnage of shipping destroyed, and the number of U-boats sunk, which had continued to be so high that on 8 February 1943 Doenitz, Raeder's successor, was forced to attribute it to treason, as well as to Allied air supremacy in the Atlantic, increased even further. In May, at the figure of 45, it became insupportable, and led to the total, if temporary, withdrawal of U-boats from the North Atlantic at the end of that month.

Doenitz, and Raeder before him, had done what they could in the past few months to prevent this development, urging the diversion of German aircraft to co-operate with the U-boats, presenting plans for an even greater U-boat construction programme of 27-30 a month, and experimenting with new, acoustic, torpedoes. But the aircraft were not available; Hitler's consent to the increased diversion of man-power and material had little effect in view of the shortages prevailing in these directions; and the new torpedoes were not in production when the crisis occurred in May. After the event, moreover, Doenitz was forced to admit that he had been defeated by two new factors which had not received attention, and to which he had no reply. The first, 'the controlling factor', he said on 31 May 1943, was 'the use of a new locating device by Allied ships and aircraft'. The other, which he had already explained on 14 May, was that, in conjunction with new radar devices, the Allies had initiated, in April, a series of offensives in the Bay of Biscay. These met with such success that the only exit for U-boats had been reduced to a narrow lane through the Bay, close to the Spanish coast, the passage of which was taking ten days.

These were the two grounds on which he justified his decision

to withdraw the U-boat from the North Atlantic altogether, but at the meeting of 31 May, specially called to discuss the U-boat situation, Hitler made it obvious that he did not like the decision. In the course of the meeting he interrupted his Commander-in-Chief to exclaim that 'there can be no let-up in U-boat warfare. The Atlantic is my first line of defence in the West. Even if I have to to fight a defensive battle there, that is preferable to waiting to defend myself on the coast of Europe. I cannot afford to release enemy forces by discontinuing U-boat warfare'. Doenitz was as optimistic as possible that counter measures would be found; but he also insisted on the difference between a defensive war and insupportable losses. His decision was therefore allowed to stand, while a more reflective Hitler, at the close of the meeting, not only signed an order for an increased U-boat construction programme, which he had failed to sign since it was first presented to him in April, but even altered the stated target figure from 30 to 40 a month. He also expressed his anxiety that 'the enemy's new detection device might involve principles with which we are not familiar'.

The first important effect of the fall of Tunisia, the opening of the Mediterranean to through traffic, was completed before the end of May; and this, if only indirectly, by easing the strain on Allied shipping, led to a further deterioration of Germany's opportunities in the Battle of the Atlantic. But the war at sea had already ceased to be Hitler's chief anxiety, for, with the fall of Tunisia, the southern front of Europe was immediately threatened. That this would be so had been obvious since the Allied landings in North-West Africa; on 19 November 1942, a few days after those landings, Raeder had concluded that the Allies had ships and troops enough to undertake an all-out attack through the Mediterranean as soon as North Africa had been cleared, and that that would be the area of their next advance. But preparations against it had so far been impossible. The effort to hold Tunisia had employed all Germany's limited resources; Germany's lack of adequate intelligence had made it impossible to judge where the next attack would fall.

On 19 November, 1942 Hitler and Raeder had thought the Balkans, through the Aegean, to be the most likely direction; on 22 December 1942 Raeder had represented an attack on the Iberian peninsula as equally likely; and it was only in May, when Tunisia was about to fall, that an Allied descent into Italy was accepted for certain as the next move. Even then it remained uncertain whether the attack would come through Sicily or Sardinia. On 13 May, when Doenitz visited Rome, he found that the Italian Naval Command thought the chief danger was to Sardinia, that Mussolini thought it was to Sicily, that Kesselring agreed with Mussolini. When he returned to Germany for a meeting with Hitler on the following day he discovered that Hitler had accepted as reliable a spurious Allied order which had recently been 'captured'. He did not 'agree with the Duce that the most likely invasion point is Sicily; he believes that the discovered Anglo-Saxon order confirms the assumption that the planned attacks will be directed against Sardinia and the Peloponnesus'.

If this uncertainty complicated the German defence problem, the exhaustion of German resources ruled out counter-attack as a method of defence. Partly for this purpose and partly to off-set the difficulties facing the U-boats, especially in Biscay, the German Naval Staff had attempted, for some time past, to revive the old plan for the occupation of Spain and the seizure of Gibraltar, with Spanish connivance if possible, without it if necessary. On 22 December 1942, before he resigned, Raeder had argued that, for those two reasons, it was 'of utmost strategic importance to take over the Iberian peninsula . . . even if such a step should entail great economic sacrifices for the rest of continental Europe'. At that stage Hitler had been inclined to consider the plan; he 'intends to enter into negotiations with Spain and to prepare for an occupation'. And the Naval Staff, even after Raeder's dismissal, had not allowed the project to die. On 11 April 1943 Doenitz presented Hitler with a memorandum outlining the advantages, both for the U-boat war and for the defence of the southern front, of occupying Spain and Portugal, and renaming the project 'Gisela'.

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On 13 May, in Rome, he found that Kesselring also thought that a German attack on the Iberian peninsula 'was the best way of bringing relief to the Mediterranean situation'. On 14 May, accordingly, at his meeting with Hitler, he pressed more firmly than ever his conclusion that this 'attack against the flank of the Anglo-Saxon offensive' would be 'the best strategic solution', because it would bring about a radical change in the Mediterranean and put the U-boat war on a sounder basis.

But Doenitz's memorandum of 11 April had already admitted that 'Gisela' could only be carried out with the consent of Spain, that this did not seem likely to be given, that the operation would in any case 'greatly increase the supply problem'; and he cannot have been surprised when Hitler rejected the proposal out of hand.

. We are not capable [was Hitler's reply] of an operation of this kind. Without the consent of the Spaniards it is out of the question. . . . They are the only tough Latin people, and would carry on guerilla warfare in our rear. In 1940 it might have been possible to get Spain to agree to such a move if the Italian attack on Greece had not shocked her. It is impossible now. . . . The Axis must face the fact that it is saddled with Italy.

This was a formidable fact. Germany's resources on the southern front were limited by her commitments elsewhere; Italy's were non-existent without that excuse; and, just as the state of German commitments ruled out a counter-attack through Spain, so they made it impossible, combined with the dead weight of Italy, to contemplate any defence against the coming Allied attack except on the beaches of whichever island the Allies should choose as the stepping-stone. Doenitz recognised this during his visit to Rome on 13 May. 'Our combined forces', he told the Italian High Command on that day, 'are too weak to foil the enemy's plans by destroying his embarkation ports or the approaching invasion fleet.' He could send more U-boats to the Mediterranean, though Germany could spare nothing else; but he was 'convinced that U-boats will never be able to stop an invasion'. 'Consequently, the whole problem is defence on land. . . . Even though a naval officer would prefer to fight the enemy at sea, we must realise that

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such forces are too limited. . . . The unique sacrifice of the Italian Fleet might have helped considerably had it come earlier but . . . when the serious need for supply is compared with what may be gained from engaging the enemy, the former takes precedence now.' And it was because he recognised that the only possible plan, to fight off the Allied landings on the beaches, would 'consume much energy without getting the Axis out of its defensive position' that he made his last fruitless effort in favour of the occupation of Spain on his return to Hitler on 14 May.

Far more serious, however, than his realisation that no other course was possible was his recognition that Italian morale had collapsed. He doubted, he told Hitler, whether the Italians would do anything to make even the defence of the beaches possible; and Hitler himself, already convinced that 'some elements in Italy would be happy if Italy could become a British dominion tomorrow', began to doubt, on hearing Doenitz's report, whether even Mussolini was 'determined to carry on to the end'.

The invasion of Sicily began on 10 July 1943, achieving complete tactical surprise and meeting with no immediate resistance. Apart from underlining for Hitler his lack of strength and information, it confirmed these forebodings about the state of Italy. On 17 July, a week before Mussolini's resignation, Hitler's outstanding problem was to find someone 'capable of taking over leadership' in Italy, and of checking the demoralisation of the Italian Army. For he was 'certain' that, without the Italian Army, we cannot defend the entire peninsula. If a radical change can be brought about in the Italian situation, it will be worth taking the risk; if not, there is no point in throwing in additional German troops and thus engaging our last reserves, and we would have to withdraw to a relatively short line'. No such person was available; the Italian collapse had gone too far to be stopped.

But Mussolini fell and was succeeded by Badoglio on 25 July, and this forced Hitler's hand. He was so fearful of the consequences in the Balkans of withdrawal in Italy that he decided to hold the peninsula in any event, if necessary against the Italians.

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On 27 July, at a meeting at which Kesselring, Jodl and the German naval representative in Italy favoured the evacuation of Sicily and retreat to a line in northern Italy, Hitler, although he was undecided whether or not to evacuate Sicily—he remained so until the Allies settled the question by completing its capture on 17 August—announced that he would act at once to hold the peninsula. He ordered operations to be put in train for the rescue of Mussolini, the restoration of Fascism, the German occupation of Rome and the frustration of any attempt to escape by the Italian Fleet. 'We must act at once', he declared, 'or the Anglo-Saxons will steal a march on us by occupying the airfields. The Fascist party is only stunned and will rise again behind our lines. All arguments for further delay are wrong. These are matters which a soldier cannot comprehend, but only a man with political insight.'

This decision once made, he felt that relief and renewed confidence which can come at such moments; and the fact that he was again planning offensives, if only minor ones, and if only against the Italians, no doubt contributed to the improvement in his spirits. The knowledge that the Italian Government was negotiating with the Allies, contemplating 'treason', did nothing to impair this. On the contrary, he felt that their defection would simplify his problem. During all the uncertainty throughout August 1943 and up to the final Italian surrender on 8 September, he seemed to sail above the confusion.

On 2 August he remarked that the anti-aircraft programme was functioning well; added that, although it was not yet possible to do more, 'defensive operations are not enough: we must resume the offensive'. He was sure that 'the present predicament can be overcome if only we bear all the hardships and do everything humanly possible to keep armament production going'. On 11 August he enlarged on his plans for overcoming the air menace by employing new methods of defence and expanding anti-aircraft and fighter defences. 'Those who are not needed in the cities must get out. . . . Small houses will be built in very large numbers.

They are to have a bedroom for the parents, another one for the children with double-decker bunks, and a place for cooking.' He admitted that the situation was 'perilous' and that the coming months would bring great hardships; but 'there are many instances in history when an unexpected way out presented itself in the midst of a difficult situation such as ours'. He then discussed 'indications which point to growing differences between the Anglo-Saxons and the Russians' and 'the discrepancies between the war aims of Britain and Russia', and spoke, as if it was some consolation, of 'the danger of an expansion of Russian power into the heart of Europe'. 'Even though the Anglo-Saxons are still determined to annihilate us, favourable political developments are by no means impossible', for Britain would soon see that she had 'manoeuvred herself into an awkward position', and that 'only if all Europe is united under a strong central power, under German leadership, can there be any security from now on'. There was the further consolation that the Allies were still faced with the war with Japan, 'which was already unpopular in the U.S.A.' 'We just have to gather all our faith and all our strength, and act.' On 19 August, when Doenitz reported that radiations from the radar interception sets on the U-boats 'may have been responsible for our grievous losses', and that he hoped to renew the attack on convoys in the Atlantic at the end of September, with improved weapons, Hitler believed that 'the theory just advanced does account for many baffling facts and, with this discovery, a great advance has been made'.

Doenitz's comment on Hitler at this stage, on 15 September, was that 'the enormous strength which the Führer radiates, his unwavering confidence, his far-sighted appraisal of the Italian situation, have made it very clear that we are all very insignificant in comparison with him. . . . Anyone who believes that he can do better than the Führer is silly.' This comment sounds ludicrous now, but it is not impossible to understand Doenitz's sentiments. If only because he would never face up to difficulties, Hitler was at his best when things were simple, whether the simplicity was

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due, as in the first year of the War, to the ease of the situation or, as was now the case, to the fact that difficulties limited him on every side.

Yet Germany's position was already hopeless, and Hitler's confident phase had passed away by the middle of September 1943. In August the Russians had resumed their offensive on the Southern front, and imminent danger from Russia dominated the conferences with the Naval Commander-in-Chief for the first time on 28-29 August. France, the Vichy area of which had been occupied when the Allies landed in North-West Africa, became increasingly a liability after the surrender of the Italian Government, and in view of the continued threat from the Allies in the Mediterranean. After the Allied landings in Italy and the Italian collapse, an attack through the Balkans, either from Southern Italy or through the Aegean, seemed always imminent. The U-boats returned to the convoy routes in the second half of September, with new acoustic torpedoes and improved A.A. weapons; their new offensive met with some slight temporary success, so that Hitler, on 24 September, 'pointed with unprecedented emphasis to the importance of U-boat warfare, which is the only bright spot in an otherwise dark war situation'. But it was soon obvious that they had failed to regain the initiative, that in the Atlantic, as well as on every other front, the Allies had the upper hand. Only 20 ships were sunk in September, only 20 in October, only 14 in November and only 13—none of which was in the North Atlantic—in December 1943, while 64 U-boats were destroyed in these four months.

Despite this increasing complexity of his problems and his own return to dejection, Hitler's policy never wavered. In the Italian peninsula he held the most southerly line possible for as long as possible, in order to deny the Allies a 'bridge to the Balkans' from Southern Italy, and because of the political effect retirement would have in South-Eastern Europe. On 24 September 1943, when Field Marshal von Weichs, Army Commander of the South-Eastern area, backed up by Doenitz, pleaded for the evacuation of German outposts in the Aegean, including Crete, he rejected the

proposal for the same reason, although he agreed with Doenitz that the enemy would probably by-pass the islands in his advance. He could 'not order the proposed evacuation of the islands on account of the political repercussions that would necessarily follow. The attitude of our allies in the South-East, and also of Turkey, is determined exclusively by their confidence in our strength. To abandon the islands would create the most unfavourable impression. To avoid such a blow to our prestige we may even have to accept the eventual loss of the troops and material.'

His attitude towards the whole length of the Russian front was the same. When the Russians began their Southern offensive he determined to make the Crimea an 'impregnable fortress'. On 27 October, when it seemed that the Crimea would be cut off by land and that evacuation, if further delayed, would have to be by sea, he still insisted that it must be held as long as possible and that its evacuation must be avoided 'as long as there remains a chance of restoring the Southern front'. On 19 December his intention of holding the Crimea for as long as possible, 'if only for political reasons', was reaffirmed; while on 1 January 1944 he was still convinced that 'everything depends on checking the Russian offensive in the south and holding the Crimea'. By that date German forces in the north had been so weakened for this purpose that the Eastern Baltic was in great danger; but there, too, he 'remains firm in his determination not to yield an inch if he can help it'.

In the Atlantic the same policy was applied. Although, early in 1944 Doenitz was forced by insupportable losses to give up the fruitless attempt to renew the attacks on convoys, the number of U-boats kept at sea was only slightly reduced. U-boat warfare continued despite the fact that more U-boats were being destroyed than merchant ships.

Apart from the fact that Hitler's policy allowed no alternative to keeping the U-boats at sea, there was now an additional particular reason for the decision to continue despite these losses—the fact that since 19 December 1943, when the subject of 'possible plans

for an Anglo-Saxon invasion of Western Europe' was revived at Hitler's conferences for the first time since the scare following the American entry into the War, it had been accepted as certain that an invasion in Western Europe would be attempted by the Allies in 1944. As in the case of every Allied seaborne invasion since that in North-West Africa, and as was soon to be proved again in Normandy, Germany had no hope of preventing the attempt except on the beaches. She could only try to delay it; and the U-boats, whose mere presence at sea kept enemy naval forces occupied, were the only means available for this purpose. They failed in the task, having as little effect on the advance preparations of the Allies as they did on the crossings to Normandy after June 1944; and when that crossing occurred, Germany's own preparations on land and on the beaches were pitifully inadequate.

With the success of the initial landings, Hitler and his advisers faced once again the problem which had arisen with monotonous regularity on other fronts since the failure at Stalingrad and the loss of Tunisia; and they reached, after the same disagreements, the same conclusion about it. On 29 June 1944 Hitler 'summed up his conception of the war situation', and it was still what it had always been since the end of 1942. 'We must not', he declared, 'allow mobile warfare to develop, since the enemy surpasses us in mobility, in air power, in M.T. and in fuel. Everything depends on confining him to his bridgehead . . . and then on fighting a war of attrition to wear him down and force him back.' In all the circumstances, this was the only possible policy. For, as Keitel and Jodl had already concluded on 12 July 1944, and as Hitler must have known much earlier than that, 'if the enemy succeeds in fighting his way out of the present bridgehead, and gains freedom of action for mobile warfare, all France will be lost, our next line of defence would be the Maginot Line or the old West Wall'; and the chances of defending Germany would then be remote.

These forebodings were soon proved to be correct, for the attempt to pin the Allies down in their Normandy bridgehead was doomed to failure; and when Cherbourg had fallen, on 26 June,

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and when an American Army had landed on the south coast of France on 15 August, the overrunning of Germany, following the development of Allied mobile warfare, was only a matter of time. Even if he had not been handicapped by the revolt and the bomb-plot of 20 July, as a result of which, although he held a conference immediately after the attempt on his life, he took part in no further meetings until 13 October 1944, Hitler would still have been powerless to deal with what was an overwhelming situation. He clung to his policy, refusing to retire on any front, from the Arctic to the Balkans, until he was forced to, and, when Germany itself was at last invaded, he determined on 'scorched earth' tactics within the Reich, issuing a directive to that effect on 19 March 1945. But his policy, like the constant stream of orders he promulgated from Berlin, could only delay the inevitable total surrender.

II

But if it is obvious that Hitler's strategy after the autumn of 1942 served only to delay the end, it is necessary to emphasise that it did have that effect, and to ask whether he could have adopted any better strategy than that of playing for time by withdrawing only when retreat was forced upon him. It is one thing to claim that he applied that policy unintelligently; and General Halder is undoubtedly right to criticise his 'unproductive conception of Fortress Germany in terms of building technique', his insistence on placing the Atlantic Wall fortifications on the edge of the coast to be destroyed by enemy ship-borne guns, his belief that it would strengthen German defences to declare localities selected at random to be 'strong-points', his denial of initiative to local commanders.¹ But these mistakes, to use a distinction on which General Halder himself insists,² were all in the sphere of operations, and not in the sphere of strategy; and it is quite another thing to argue that, in

¹ Halder, *Hitler as War Lord*, pp. 63-6.

² Halder, pp. 25 and 50.

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the strategic sphere, some other policy would have been preferable to that which was pursued, or even possible.

There was, in fact, only one military alternative, that of flexible operational warfare based on strategic withdrawals. But this would have had equally disastrous results in view of the balance of force which obtained after the end of 1942; it is also probable that it would only have hastened Germany's final defeat. To withdraw in order to re-form would have been to play into the hands of the Allies, for Germany's weakness lay not merely in the dispersal of her fighting forces, but in the inferiority of all her resources to those at the enemy's command. The Allies were in a position in which they could have exploited any German withdrawals more effectively than Germany herself could have used them. Apart altogether from the political effects of such a policy in Germany itself and among Germany's satellites, its military consequences, if only because of the saving of effort for the Allies and the more rapid concentration of their strength at Germany's borders, would have been more rapidly disastrous than those which followed on Hitler's choice.

It is this which accounts for the ambiguous and inconclusive nature of General Halder's criticism of Hitler after 1942—and, indeed, of any criticism which is based on the argument that any military alternative to Hitler's strategy existed after the end of that year. General Halder seems sometimes to advance, and at others to dismiss, the view that the strategy of withdrawal and flexible warfare should have been adopted. On the one hand he argues that, after Stalingrad, the only path which promised success on the Russian front was that of flexible operational warfare, which was pressed on Hitler to no avail; that the strategy which Hitler followed in Russia in 1943 and 1944 was 'unmilitary warfare'; that operational counter-attacks and mobile defence would have been a better answer to the invasion of the West than the attempt to hold the coast.¹ At the same time, however, he admits that it had become unmistakably clear, towards the end of 1943 at the latest,

¹ Halder, pp. 62-5.

HITLER'S STRATEGY IN DEFEAT

that the War had been lost By the sacrifice of German blood and at the cost of exposing the homeland to the enemy air forces, it could still be kept going for a little while longer. But were the results to be gained by such a course worth this sacrifice? . . . Would it have been possible to beat off the Invasion and thus provide the basis for a tolerable peace? Had Fortress Germany no hope of overcoming the enemy's strength on its walls? No! Let us at once and for all have done with these fairy tales. . . . Germany had no means of defence.¹

This second is the more realistic approach. The War had been lost by the end of 1942; there was no military alternative to that of playing for time. But if this is so, then it is also true that no strategy could have been more effective in gaining time than that which Hitler followed, and the logical implication of Halder's views is not that Hitler's conduct of the War was wrong after 1942, but that he should never have made the initial political mistake of beginning it against nations that would prove too powerful, and that he should now have brought it to an end. But to say this is to beg the question. The initial mistake had been committed; the War could not be liquidated by negotiation; Hitler could not surrender.

Before dealing with these political, as opposed to military, considerations, it is necessary to introduce the remaining military factor, the 'secret weapons', into this estimate of his strategy. If it is clear that the War had been lost by the end of 1942, it is equally clear that Hitler himself accepted that fact with only one reservation. He knew that the balance of forces was such that, without some *deus ex machina* in the shape of a new weapon, defeat was unavoidable; and the military problem is to judge whether he was right to regard the new weapons, which did exist and which were being developed, as sufficient justification for the decision to prolong the War.

As it happens, this is a moot point. Halder himself takes the view that the secret weapons 'in spite of everything, brought him within a hair's breadth of victory'; and he blames Hitler for the loss of two decisive years in the early development of the V1 and V2.² But there is no documentary evidence with which to confirm

¹ Halder, p. 64.

² Halder, pp. 12 and 16.

or deny Halder's charge, and the accuracy of Halder's opinion must be doubted. It is true that the V 1 and V 2 were introduced too late, when, as Halder says, 'the black shadow of the enemy command of the air already lay over their production and use'; and, by implication, as well as from experience of the weapons, it must be accepted that their earlier introduction would have created great problems for the Allied Powers. But it also seems certain, and it is more in accordance with Halder's view that the War was already lost, that their earlier introduction would have been met by a different conduct of the War by the Allied Powers; that it would have affected the course but not the outcome, and probably not even the length, of the War. For the Allies had their own secret weapons, and they were also in a vastly superior strategic position in every respect.

A similar argument arises in connection with the development of the new type of U-boat, on which considerable contemporary evidence is available.¹ Hitler certainly did nothing to delay this, and it is doubtful whether he could have done more than he did to advance it. Its history, on the contrary, provides incontrovertible evidence of the extent to which, in man-power and materials, operationally and strategically, Germany was overwhelmed already by 1943. So much was this the case that there can be no doubt that, even if Germany had been able to operate the new boats, and even if they had had the success which Hitler and Doenitz expected, their introduction, like that of the V 1 and V 2, would have been countered by the adoption of different plans by the Allied Powers. And if it is still insisted that, as with the V weapons, so with the new U-boats, Germany almost won the race to have them in operation, it is still permissible to ask whether the confidence in their eventual success, by which Hitler and Doenitz were buoyed up in the last eighteen months of the War, was not misplaced.

Doenitz was right to claim, on 26 February 1944, that the continued failure of the old U-boats confirmed the correctness of the decision to change over 'to new-type U-boats and under-water

¹ See Appendix C.

tactics'. The new U-boats would have presented a formidable problem to the Allies, in view of their high submerged speed, and their introduction would have gone far to meet the problem created by the fact that Germany was losing U-boats at an insupportable rate. But it is far from being certain that under-water tactics would have had a great effect, on the other hand, on the sinking of Allied ships and therefore on the course of the War; and operational experience with the *Schnorkel*, fitted to the old-type U-boats in 1944 as a temporary measure, was all to the opposite effect.

But these remarks on the new weapons are necessarily tentative, as has already been admitted; and if one cannot be certain, even now, that their introduction would not have turned the scale, certainty on this score was even less possible in advance. It is therefore unrealistic to blame Hitler for using them as an additional argument in favour of playing for time, especially if one also takes the view, as Halder does, that they might have made a difference.

From a strictly military point of view, then, it is difficult to find fault with this element in his strategy, just as, from the strictly military point of view, on the assumption that the War was to be continued, it is impossible to argue that some other strategy would have been more intelligent than Hitler's after the beginning of 1943. To deny this is as dangerous as it is unrealistic. It is dangerous because it is tantamount to arguing that, but for Hitler, Germany could still have extricated herself from defeat; it is unrealistic because that is not the case. It is possible to argue that, but for Hitler, Germany would never have begun the War; it is not possible to claim that, but for Hitler, Germany would still have avoided defeat in the situation which existed after the end of 1942. Germany was already well and truly defeated; and, as we have already seen in Halder's case, criticism of Hitler for his conduct of the War must be inextricably confused with criticism of his political decision to continue it at all.

This last decision, however, was itself so inevitable that to criticise it is irrelevant. Whatever hopes Hitler may have placed in

the secret weapons, in whatever wishful thinking he may have indulged, both on this score and about the possibility of a split between Russia and the West, the other circumstances were such that his strategy would have been no different if those weapons and that possibility had never existed.

In the first place, although after the American entry into the War, he was prepared to abandon out-and-out victory as an aim, and to be content with working for a stalemate, he was never able, after that date, to reach a military position from which an acceptable negotiated settlement could have been obtained. He could continue to strive for such a position, and that in itself was one reason for adopting the strategy he pursued; but, if not from the American entry into the War, then certainly after the autumn of 1942, he had to face the fact that it was unlikely to be achieved, and that to surrender or to continue a hopeless struggle were the only two courses that remained.

The second consideration behind his decision to continue was simply the fact that surrender, of the two remaining alternatives, was out of the question. For the sort of man he was, and for the sort of task on which he conceived himself to be engaged, surrender could never be considered. Because his own ego was the only factor that really counted, he was never in doubt that, rather than give way, he would sacrifice everything, even the German nation itself, if final victory or a stalemate should escape him; and what is astonishing is not that he took this view, but that the Germans accepted it so fully for so long.

For he had made it clear from the beginning that this would be his attitude; and it is worth adding that the promulgation by the Allies of the war aim of unconditional surrender, which did not occur till the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, can have had no influence on Hitler, whatever effect it may have had in bolstering the determination of Germany to stay behind him. All along, he had acted, as he wrote in the memorandum of 9 October 1939,¹ on the assumption that the enemy's object was 'the dissolution or

¹ *N.D.*, 52-L, and pp. 39 above.

destruction of the German Reich', and with the conviction that, 'in opposition to this, the German war aim is the final military despatch of the power and ability of the Western Powers ever again to be able to oppose the consolidation and further development of the German people in Europe'. Should he fail in that aim, he had always been certain, not only of what would be the objective of the Allies, but of what his own attitude would be. The determination that there should be 'no capitulation to the outside forces, no revolution from the interior forces' had been defined as long ago as in the speech of 23 November 1939.¹ It had also been implicit in his behaviour since the outbreak of the War; and he had made it clear in the same speech, in the first few weeks of the War, that 'I will stand or fall in this struggle' and that 'I will never survive the defeat of my people'.

¹ *N.D.*, 789-PS, and pp. 46 above.

APPENDIX A

THE GERMAN SURFACE FLEET

1. *The German surface fleet in 1939:*

Battleships: *Schlesien* and *Schleswig-Holstein* (both unfit for operations outside the Baltic).

Battle-cruisers: *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst*.

Pocket battleships: *Admiral Graf Spee*, *Admiral Scheer* and *Deutschland* (renamed '*Lützow*' in 1940).

8-inch cruisers: *Admiral Hipper*,* *Blücher*.†

6-inch cruisers: *Königsberg*,† *Nürnberg*, *Leipzig*, *Köln*, *Karlsruhe*,† *Emden*.*

Smaller vessels: included 22 destroyers, 20 torpedo-boats, about 20 E-boats.

2. *Ships lost or damaged during the invasion of Norway:*

Ships marked † in the above list were sunk during the invasion of Norway. Ships marked * were damaged. In addition, nine of the destroyers were sunk and one damaged.

3. *Surface ships completed during the War:*

Battleships: *Bismarck* (ready to operate by May 1941), *Tirpitz* (ready to operate by November 1941).

8-inch cruiser: *Prinz Eugen* (ready to operate by May 1941).

APPENDIX B

GERMANY'S INFRINGEMENTS OF THE NAVAL CLAUSES OF THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

THERE were, almost as a matter of principle, infringements of the Versailles provisions, wherever possible in matters of detail, from the outset. Early E-boats, for example, were secretly armed for torpedo-firing because it was not intended to count them against the number of

GERMANY'S INFRINGEMENTS OF VERSAILLES

torpedo-firing vessels allowed by the Treaty. (See *N.D.*, 141-C of February 1932). Another *N.D.* (32-C) contains a long list of the evasions of this type, as effected up to or intended in 1933. *N.D.*, 17-C and D-854, show that a small amount of U-boat building was carried on abroad, in Holland, Spain, Finland, for example, by the German Navy continuously after 1920. These and other documents are recapitulated in *Nuremberg Proceedings*, Part I, pp. 191-203. Up to the end of 1934, however, the total effect of these many minor infringements had done little to create a new German Navy.

In 1934-35 more serious infringements began, the Anglo-German Naval Agreement being anticipated in several directions. A building programme in accordance with the Agreement was announced within a month of the Agreement, and some progress was made with it before the negotiations began, as, for example, with the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* (*N.D.*, 180-C) and with the construction of U-boats in Germany, the first of which were launched in June 1935, the month in which the Agreement was concluded.

But such further expansion as took place was kept within the restricted limits negotiated with Great Britain in 1935. It is clear, moreover, that, to some extent, the Agreement was anticipated, and the anticipation was deliberately allowed to leak out, with the object of putting pressure on Great Britain to secure her acceptance of the German naval proposals. The fact, for example, that U-boat construction had begun in Germany in contravention of Versailles was openly announced, with this end in view, before the beginning of the Anglo-German negotiations.

APPENDIX C

THE NEW U-BOATS

THE possibility of developing a new type of U-boat was first mentioned to Hitler on 13 November 1941. In the early stages of experiment, the Naval Staff did not think it necessary to refer the subject to him again until 28 September 1942, when the need for a U-boat with increased underwater speed had been underlined by the defeat of the old U-boats, and when experimental production could at last be considered. Hitler then gave full support to the idea, and complete freedom to Raeder to take all decisions concerning experimental and mass production. But it

was already obvious, as Raeder announced on 22 December 1942, that the new type could not be operational in any numbers until 1944 at the earliest; and on 8 July 1943 Doenitz, Raeder's successor, made it obvious that further difficulties had emerged and had led to the abandonment of the original models.

He told Hitler that new designs for an 'electro-submarine' with an under-water speed of 19 knots, a surface speed of 15 knots and a fish-like shape (some of these details being added by Doenitz on 19 January 1944) had been completed, and that they retained only the hull of the 'Walter' design, the model with which the original experiments had been conducted. He added that 'in comparison with the Walter boats, the new type had the additional advantage of being able to recharge batteries and thus extend its endurance'; recommended that production should be switched to this newest type; and announced that, though he himself regarded it as too pessimistic, the Naval Staff's estimated date for the completion of the first of the boats was November 1944. Hitler expressed his complete agreement and ordered Speer to give top priority to the programme.

The renewed failure of the old-type U-boats, when they returned to the Atlantic in September 1943, confirmed, as Doenitz said on 26 February 1944, that 'our general tendency to change over to the new-type U-boat and under-water tactics is correct in every respect'; and that failure, leading Hitler and Doenitz to put all their hopes in the Atlantic on the emergence of the new boats, was enough to ensure that all possible emphasis was kept on their development. But Germany could not win this war against time. Although a large proportion of the 1944 building programme consisted of the new models, of which there were now both ocean-going (Type XXI) and short-range (Type XXIII) versions, their construction was already hampered by the shortage of man-power and materials, and by enemy air raids. On 12 April 1944 they were being held up 'as a result of the priority granted to the Air Force', a fact which Hitler admitted to be a great disadvantage but which, because of the air menace, he could not alter. 'From the broader point of view', he added, 'the Fighter Command will have to have this priority; otherwise industry might be destroyed and U-boat construction halted altogether.' By 4 May 1944 the air raids had become so intense that Doenitz had become afraid that all the new U-boats would be destroyed in the yards, before they were finished; and on the same occasion he revealed the combined effects of raids and shortages by stating that only 140 U-boats would be delivered in 1944 instead of the projected 218.

THE NEW U-BOATS

These difficulties grew worse, with the progress of the fighting on land, in the remaining year of the War, with the result that, although two Type XXIII U-boats underwent operational trials off the British coast between mid-February and mid-March 1945, and although one Type XXI was due to leave for the American coast at the end of March, and six more for the Atlantic in April, none had engaged the enemy, as far as can be discovered, when all U-boats were ordered to cease hostilities on 4 May 1945.

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